

Growing Up in Christ

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:15-16

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We are in Ephesians 4 again today. I'll read verses 11 through 16, the focus of the sermon today will be verses 15 and 16, but we will make a couple of references back to 11 through 14. I'll be reading and preaching from the Modern English Version. Hear the Word of the Lord: "[\[Ephesians 4:11-16\]](#) *He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, and for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so we may no longer be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness with deceitful scheming. But, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him, who is the head, Christ Himself, from whom the whole body is joined together and connected by every joint and ligament, as every part effectively does its work and grows, building itself up in love.*" The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.

Paul has been using an analogy of the body, the picture of a body, to bring home to us the realities of the good gifts of Christ to us and what the intended end of those gifts are for us. We looked last time at some of those gifts, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, at what they're to be doing and what the end of that is. Paul carries on here to verses 15 and 16, let me read them again quickly: "[\[Ephesians 4:15-16\]](#) *But, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him, who is the head, Christ Himself, from whom the whole body is joined together and connected by every joint and ligament, as every part effectively does its work and grows, building itself up in love.*" There are four points from the text today let me state them as we begin so that you can get them down. I'm sorry, not four, but five. 1) What we need to do is grow up in all things into Christ. 2) How we grow up in all things is through speaking the truth in love. 3) Why we need to grow up in all things is because He is our head and the source of our being. 4) Who needs to grow up in all things is each part of Christ's body. 5) How we grow up in all things as a connected body under Christ our head is, again, through love.

One, what we need to do is grow up in all things into Christ. Paul says this explicitly: "[\[Ephesians 4:15\]](#)... *we may grow up in all things into Him...*" This is what we need to do. He speaks in the first part of this large paragraph, [verses] 11 through 16 being the entirety of it, talking about growing into a complete man, the measure of the stature of the fullness Christ, he makes clear that we are to be maturing. In the first couple verses of Hebrews chapter 6 it says: "[\[Hebrews 6:1-2\]](#) *Therefore, leaving the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*" Paul expected, as the writer of

the Hebrews expected, that there would be a maturing, a growing up in the Christian faith. This growing up is picturing for us sanctification as a believer. "[Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 35](#)] Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, that means it's an ongoing labor of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness." This is a maturing.

Now again this is picturing for us, because we know that when we take our kids to the doctor we nowadays get these print outs showing where they were last year, where they are this year, where they should be next year, and where everybody else is on this curve, right? The expectation is once we come out of the womb, there can be a little drop in weight initially but that's not ideal, and some of us later in life might desire a little drop in weight to be a little more ideal, but generally in life we are on an upward trajectory. But we know that sanctification, more often than not, looks like an elevating heart monitor where we-- we grow, drop off a little bit, we grow again. Overall, though, we see the trajectory of maturity in the faith. But sometimes we're maturing, sometimes we're dematuring, immaturing, however we want to say it. We grow, we recess a little bit, so that's why it's picturing for us sanctification. That we are maturing, we are growing up in all things, into Christ.

Calvin makes the point that in light of this scriptural analogy [that] we are never men in this life. This of course points to using the picture of maturing from childhood onward, that our adulthood would be when we are fully mature. And where will we be when we are fully mature? In the presence of Jesus Christ. This will be that point of full fruition. Calvin is also keen to note that we should not act like we can only ever be small, infantile children. There should be a growing, even a growing up. A maturing in the faith and that is what we need to do.

Secondly, how we grow up in all things is through speaking the truth in love. It's interesting that of all the points Paul could have gone on to here, after finishing verse 14 (clinging to the truth, not being convinced of error) [of] all the things he could have said, he noted maturity. You're not just what we believe, the truth, but also how we present that truth, which is in love. There are some in the world who merely find it loving to speak the truth. And so they equate just speaking the truth with 'well, I'm being loving, because I'm speaking the truth.' No, this agape, this love marks our words even as it exposes our hearts. Now this is applied to preachers. A preacher's job is to speak the truth and to do so in love. It should be the ongoing note and tenor of the pastor's ministry: is the truth and the truth in love. This is also applied to the members of the body.

Remember last week we briefly, well maybe lengthily, talked about the abuse of the body, to get it to do what it was not meant to do. We can easily want out of good intentions and even holy desires to resort to things outside of speaking the truth and doing so in love. Remember in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3 the text says: "[Genesis 3:1](#)] Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field," some translations say 'crafty than any beast of the field', "which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" See he distorts what God says there. But what is Eve's response? "[Genesis 3:2-3](#)] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the garden; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You will not eat of it, nor will you touch it, or else you will die.'" See the serpent took away from what God said, Eve added to what God said.

Now, lest you think that I am hanging Eve out to dry, I think it was probably her pastor who went on to expand on the truth, out of love for her, "But if we're not to eat of it, then certainly we shouldn't even touch it!" He went beyond what he should have perhaps. We are to speak the truth in love that is how we grow up. That is the contrasting statement between this immaturity that tosses us about, distracts us

with these winds and waves, this craftiness. But speaking the truth in love we may grow up in all things into Him.

How do you speak to one another? What do you speak to one another? Is what you speak appropriate for the maturity level of the one to whom you are speaking? Do you know the spiritual maturity level of the one to whom you are speaking? Why do you avoid speaking to one another? If you believe someone is avoiding you in conversation, what do you presume about them? All of this is carried along by Christian charity and affection for one another. We are to not just speak the truth, we are to speak the truth in love. And as we love one another, we're to understand where the other is and to show care and concern for their spiritual growth and their maturing in their walk with the Lord.

Number three, why we need to grow up in all things is because He is our head and the source of our being. Again, the picture is that of a body. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, yeah Ephesians 5 even as wives and husbands are spoken to and Christ is the head and-- and Paul throws in there about loving our own body, we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The ongoing picture in scripture is that of a body and that Christ is our head. Medically we know that when there are complications between the head and the rest of the body that that causes problems in the body. A dear brother who is now with the Lord, running and jumping is Harry Wilke. He spent over 50 years in a wheelchair because in his first couple weeks of college in physical education class they were doing two man barrel rolls. And he didn't tuck his head fast enough and he heard the snap. From that point until the day he died the relationship between his head and his body was a complicated one.

We need to grow up in all things because we are not disconnected from our head. We are indeed connected to our head. And this is a connectivity that exalts the head, not individual members of the body. If someone's single arm grows to inordinate size it distracts from the rest of what's going on. You meet them and you think "What is going on with that arm?" I had a friend in high school who had the opposite problem, he had one arm that was inordinately small and he couldn't hide it because he was a basketball player and he was a pretty good basketball player too. When one member of the body is growing too quickly or too slowly when the whole body isn't growing together, being communicated to and fed and nourished from the head, it creates problems. Now it's true, "[\[Romans 11:36\]](#) For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever!" He is the source of our being. This is true in our physicality, He created us, He made us, He sustains us. He is our reason for being and living. Yet all the more it is true of us spiritually: that He is our source, that He is our head and we need to seek after the growing and maturing of the body for His glory and His praise.

Fourthly, who needs to grow up in all things is each part of Christ's body. Paul mentions here in the text the whole body, every joint and ligament, every part. Paul has a holistic concern here for the body. He doesn't focus in a wrong way on individuals, he doesn't focus in a wrong way on merely the whole, he understands that the body is made up of each of these aspects. He understands that-- that-- well, I was fixing to use this word that I'm not sure everybody knows: "fascia." It's the stuff that kind of holds all of your innards where they need to be held. Sorry, when your wife's a massage therapist these words creep into your vocabulary. The fascia of the body of Christ is the Holy Spirit. He is the one who binds us together and places us where we belong in the body of Christ and holds us there and sustains us and feeds us and nourishes us and grows us and matures us so that we fit properly in with the rest of the body of Christ. Paul warned Timothy in 2 Timothy 1: "[\[2 Timothy 1:13\]](#) Follow the pattern of sound teaching which you have heard from me in the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus." There's a connection again between the truth and love. "[\[2 Timothy 1:14\]](#) Guard the treasure that was committed to you through the Holy Spirit who lives in us."

As we understand that presence of the Holy Spirit we understand that, yes, He is the one who fills us individually, who brings to us the person and work of Jesus Christ and applies it to our hearts. But He also fills us corporately and makes us the difference between a bag of body parts and a living functioning body that works and lives and breathes and serves together. The Spirit connects us and helps us to minister to one another and with one another as a connected body. We have the feet that go and take others where they cannot go. We have the hands that serve others who cannot serve themselves. We have the mouths that preach to and teach us. We have the arms and elbows that bend around us and comfort us. We have the knees that pray exponentially for us. These are obviously my word pictures but I hope they encourage you as you take this scriptural analogy of the body and bring it to bear on Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church. When you are down and have moments of struggle, there are those who will comfort you, pray with and for you. When you're elated, there are those who will celebrate with you. When you have need, there are those who will serve you and help provide for you. Turn to your brothers and sisters, your fellow body parts, for help, for nurture, for comfort.

Fifthly, how we grow up in all things as a connected body under Christ our head is, again, through love. "[[Ephesians 4:15-16](#)] *But, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him, who is the head, Christ Himself, from whom the whole body is joined together and connected by every joint and ligament, as every part effectively does its work and grows, building itself up in love.*" Love is how we build ourselves up, how we work, and how we grow together. It is through love, through the rightly ordered affections and actions toward God and each other. This is the summary of the idea of love in scripture: our interaction with God and our interaction with one another. And God's law gives us the fullness of this: how we are to love God and how we are to love one another. Loving God and loving others.

In Galatians 5, Paul says it this way: "[[Galatians 5:13-14](#)] *You, brothers, have been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty to give an opportunity to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For the entire law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*" Now this is interesting where Paul goes between verses 14 and 15, because he's telling them to love one another. And what happens if you don't love one another? The contrast is: "[[Galatians 5:15](#)] *But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another.*" I hope this isn't too graphic but if we're not loving one another, if we're not speaking the truth in love for one another, we are using that truth to practice spiritual cannibalism. As we might devour one another in our interactions and in our conversations.

And this brings me to something for which I need to ask your forgiveness as a congregation. I have a great pastoral concern for not just holding to the glorious principles we find in Christ's word, but doing so in a loving way with one another and with the world around us. How I have tried to communicate this and say this in the past has clearly come across wrongly. And I know this because some of you are under the presumption that I despise you for holding zealously to the principles of our church. And that could not be farther from where my heart is on this matter. But I do have a great pastoral concern that we show great affection for one another and concern for those who are younger than us in the faith. That we not expect them to exercise muscles that have not fully developed yet and that we speak the truth with one another in love. And out of that great pastoral concern I have violated the very principle that I've tried to confirm and build up in you. And I've been wrong in doing that.

Brothers and sisters, we are the body of Christ in this place. By the Holy Spirit we are inextricably linked as hands, as feet, as arms, as legs, as mouths, with Christ as our head. And we should have a great love for the principles for the truth of God's word, for the teaching of our church. And we should have a great love for one another and those whom the Lord brings into our midst to be discipled, to be

converted, to be trained up. I pray that we can walk together as those two great loves go hand in hand, as we grow up in all things into Christ by excelling in speaking the truth in love. I have nothing more that I can say, I love you all.

Stand with me as we pray.