

## Introduction

The human body is an incredible thing. You'd think with all the advanced knowledge and medical technology we have that we would know everything that's in a human body. When you consider all the life-saving medical procedures that are possible, you'd think we'd know more. Surgeons can operate on an *unborn* baby. We're still discovering parts of the body, though.

About twenty years ago we discovered a layer in the eye called "Dua's layer". It's just 15 microns thick—that's one-millionth of a meter. It's right behind the cornea. The guy who discovered this layer—Dr. Dua—says this discovery will help treat eye injuries. We operate on eyeballs; how did we not know it was there?

Did you know we recently discovered a *fourth* set of salivary glands? (I didn't know we had three sets.) In 2020 a group of Dutch scientists discovered Tubarial glands behind the nasal cavity. They were so bored during COVID they discovered more salivary glands. These glands are responsible for moistening the inner surfaces of several cavities inside your head and they have an impact on radiation therapy for certain kinds of cancer and preventing some side effects.

Just ten years ago researchers discovered the anterolateral ligament—the ALL—in the knee. How many times have doctors operated on injured knees before 2014? How is it they never saw this thing in there and thought, "Gee...what is *that*? That's not on the drawings."

James Tour, perhaps *the* leading organic chemist in the entire world, has said that the more we discover and understand the human body, including the complexity of a single cell, the further we get from fully comprehending life. The more we study and discover the details of the body, the more we realize just how little we actually know. The knowledge of our ignorance only grows.

So it is with the body of Christ. Because it is ever-growing and ever-changing, the local church becomes ever more complex as new parts are added and existing parts grow and change. As with the human body, the more we study the church—our local church—the more we learn how each of the parts fit together and the more we learn how necessary each part truly is. We will see this with greater clarity this morning. We're in Ephesians 4.

<sup>Eph 4:15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> 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.

Ephesians 4:15–16

## Speaking the Truth in Love

In verse 15 Paul says we are to speak the truth in love. This verse is often used when there is need to confront another person. The idea is we must speak truth to that person, even hard truth, but we must have a loving disposition when doing it. That's not what this verse is saying. Those are true things, but those are not what was on Paul's mind when he wrote this.

We don't have an English verb for the word Paul uses here. We translate it "speaking the truth" but if "truth" were a verb we could render this, "truthing in love". It implies speaking, but it is more than mere words. Everything about us, the entirety of our lives, must *truth* in love. The way in which we interact with the slowest moving cashier in Meijer history must be *truthing in love*. The way in which we interact with that annoying coworker must be *truthing in love*. The way in which we interact with a brother or sister in Christ who is struggling must be *truthing in love*. The way in which we interact with annoying drivers...okay, too far. The point is "*truthing in love*" is a whole-life experience as much as it is speaking.

Paul is making a contrast here, and the contrast isn't about confronting people. He begins with "Rather". Rather than the other thing, *truth in love*. He said the Lord has given gifted people to the church to help the church grow into maturity, so that we are no longer children who are tossed back and forth "by every wind of doctrine". Rather than being swayed by false teaching, let us be *truthing in love*. That's the contrast here.

Because this is the contrast, the truth he means is not the truth of a particular matter. He's not saying to speak the truth to your coworker: "The truth is, when you're late with your TPS report it makes the whole department look bad." That's not what he means. He's already declared the truth back in verses 4-6: there is one body and one Spirit with one hope; there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; there is one God and Father of all. Paul is using a *creedal declaration*, which is a summary of the Christian faith. He often does this.

In Philippians scholars believe Paul is citing an early creed: Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. This succinct summary statement could be easily memorized so that it was readily available to new believers who were being asked about their newfound faith in a crucified man.

He cites another early creedal statement in 1 Corinthians 15: Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures and was buried; he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He fleshes it out a bit more there but you can see the idea of a creed here. This saying would be accompanied, of course, with teaching in those Scriptures, but this was a statement that was easily memorized.

In 1 Timothy 3 he cites what is probably an early hymn: he was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up into glory. There is even such a creed in Romans 1! Paul opens the letter by declaring he was set apart for the gospel of God,

Rom 1:2 which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scrip-

tures, <sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Romans 1:2–4

Notice how these creeds are centered on who Jesus is and what he has done, while being thoroughly Trinitarian? This is the truth we must be *truthing*. We most hold forth the faith in all we say and do. Unlike immature Christians, mature believers are firmly rooted in the faith once delivered. To speak the truth in love is to always be pointing others to the Lord Jesus, for he is the center of our faith.

## We Are to Grow into Him

It is through *truthing in love* that we grow up in every way into Christ who is the head. To say it another way, it is through preaching the gospel to one another that we mature in our faith. Remember, the gifted leaders he mentions in verse 11 each have word-based ministries. These ministries are centered on proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. We must remember that the gospel is a proclamation, not a formula.

The gospel is never “if you...” but is instead, “Christ has ...” The gospel is not the proclamation that if you do a certain thing, this other thing will be the result. That cannot be good news, for it depends entirely on you, and you’re the reason you need salvation in the first place. Rather than “if you”, the gospel is “here’s what Christ has done, is doing, and will do”.

The gospel, therefore, is not a panacea, a magic pill that takes away all your problems. Some present it as such, and they are lying to you. When some claim the gospel is the promise that your financial problems will go away, they’re lying. When some claim the gospel is the promise that your health problems will go away, they’re lying. In fact, they are lying about the Lord Jesus and are, in effect, condemning countless people whose lives are filled with financial struggles and ongoing health problems, and sadly, those two are often connected. They’re lying about the Lord Jesus and his apostles, each of whom suffered greatly for his faithfulness to the gospel.

The gospel is the promise that God in Christ through his Spirit *is making* all things new. This is true of your financial problems and it is true of your health problems and it is true of your relationship problems. It’s true of all your problems. We must be careful with the verb tenses: *is making*, not *has made*. There is no promise that his incredible work will be finished during our lifetimes. We await resurrection. It is still a future reality, even as we *begin* to experience it now.

It is through being continually pointed to the truth of the promises of God being fulfilled in Christ that we grow up into Christ in every way. “In every way” means there is no part of our lives that is sectioned off from the Lord Jesus. This includes the sort of media we consume, whether movies or television or music—or *social*. This includes how we spend our money. This includes our sexual behavior. This includes how we treat strangers. This includes how interact with our friends and neighbors and coworkers. This includes how we treat those who disagree with us politically. This includes how we respond to difficulties

we encounter from day to day. This includes how we spend our free time—including our weekends.

When Paul says we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, he means the entirety of our lives must be brought into submission to the Lord Jesus. *He* is the head, the very thing that guides the entire body. As the head, he determines the right function and behavior of every part of the body. That's why Paul then stresses the whole body, every part of it, comes from the head.

It is the head, he says, that brings about growth. We are to grow up into Christ, who is the head, who makes the whole body grow. The growth he means here is growth in *maturity*. Earlier in his letter he wrote about numerical growth. In chapter 2 he wrote about the church being the dwelling place for God, a temple built on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets. As Jews and Gentiles are being saved, they are added into this one body. In 2:21 he says “the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord”. He means growth numerically; the church gets larger.

In our text he means spiritual maturity. We *grow up* into Christ. Every part of our lives is brought under the Lordship of Christ. The whole body grows. That is, the church *as the church* matures. Yes, each individual believer grows as God transforms him or her “from one degree of glory to another”, or little by little. Yet, it is the whole body, the church, that must grow in maturity here.

## **Each Part**

In order for the whole body to grow, each part must work properly. He says in verse 16 Christ, who is the head, makes the whole body grow, but notice carefully what he says. He adds an important qualifier: “when each part is working properly”. It is when each part is functioning as it should, the whole body is made to grow. The word “properly” has the idea of working *to the fullest measure of one's giftedness*.

Remember the context here in chapter 4. God has given gifted leaders to the church to equip the church that the church might do the work of ministry. Each one of us, then, is responsible for the ministry of this church. As I said last week, the elders lead the ministry and the deacons facilitate the ministry and the gifted leaders equip for the ministry, but it is the *church* that does the work of ministry. Each one of us is a minister of the Lord Jesus and if some of us do not do the work we've been given to do, the body will not grow properly.

The problem comes when individual believers continue to act in an immature manner. Remember what we saw last week. Immaturity is seen in individualism and often comes with a what's-in-it-for-me attitude. Maturity is seen in unity: what do others get? When we seek to take care of only ourselves and seek to grow up into Christ *all by ourselves*, we discover we cannot, actually, do that. New Testament scholar Clinton Arnold put it this way:

Paul's vision for the church is that each member of the group will actively contribute to the growth of the body and thus facilitate its growth to maturity. The ultimate goal far transcends personal spiritual growth because the entire body is in view.

Clinton Arnold, ECNT

We tend to think of spiritual growth as personal and private. In our text Paul is clear: the whole body grows as a single body, a unified whole, and this growth happens *when each part is working properly*. This means if any one of us refuses to “work properly” we are stunting the growth of our church.

Remember what spiritual gifts really are: they are people. The Spirit of God empowers each believer in some way. This empowerment is what is often called a spiritual gift. As Paul indicates in verse 11, however, gifted people are the gifts given to the church. When Christ ascended into heaven “he gave gifts to men”. That is, he sent his Holy Spirit to dwell among us and to empower us to live for him. Each and every one of us, then, is a gift from the Lord to his church.

If you are not participating in the life of the church, you are not working properly. Notice what I *didn't* say. I didn't say if you are not *doing something* in the church. There are things to be done, tasks to be accomplished. We need people to step up and serve in specific capacities, but the way in which each part must work properly is by participating in the life of the church. *You* are the gift, not the service you provide or the function you perform. The whole body, *truthing in love*, makes the body grow up into Christ.

Maturity in Christ is the goal for this life. We grow up that we may do the things mature people do. As I said last week, kids don't grow into adulthood to keep growing physically; they grow into adulthood so that they can do the things mature people are supposed to do. So it is with spiritual maturity. Our aim is for maturity, that we might do the things spiritually mature people do.

## Christlikeness

What is it that spiritually mature people do? African scholar Yusufu Turaki put it this way:

The mature...have grown in their faith and knowledge of Christ and see all things from Christ's perspective. Thus unlike the false teachers they speak *the truth* and because they are like Christ, they speak it *in love*. ...When we practise and speak the truth, we are in a process of growing up into Christ *who is the Head* of the body (church). Our ultimate goal must be to attain Christlikeness in all things.

Yusufu Turaki, Africa Bible Commentary

Notice how he connects being like Christ with having the perspective of Christ. Where does he get the idea of having the perspective of Jesus from this text? Other than *everywhere*? The context is the gospel of Jesus. For the first three chapters Paul went to great lengths to proclaim the gospel of Jesus to the Ephesians. They were *to sit* in this truth. They were to rest in Christ.

They were chosen before the foundation of the world and predestined for adoption as sons. In him they have redemption through his blood. They have received an inheritance in him. They were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who *guarantees* that inheritance. Though they were once dead in their sins, God made them alive in Christ. Though they were once alienated from the people of God and strangers to the covenants of promise and were

without hope in this world, Jesus has brought them near and has torn down the dividing wall of hostility and has created a new humanity, his church.

This was God's plan from the beginning. His eternal purpose in Christ has always been the church and this purpose is fully realized in Christ. From the beginning of the world God has been working to create for himself a people, and this people ultimately is found in his church. Therefore, because of all this, the Ephesian believers must now walk in this truth.

They can only walk when they sit in it, however. Only by resting in the truth of the gospel can they walk in a manner worthy of their calling. What is this calling? It is the calling to maintain the unity of the Spirit, a people united in Christ despite their vast differences. It is to walk in the truth that there is one body, one Spirit, and one hope; that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; that there is one God and Father of all. *This* is the perspective of Christ.

Thus the Lord Jesus has given gifted people to his church in order to equip his church for the work of ministry, and this work is bringing about the unity of the faith in maturity. How is this maturity measured or quantified? Verse 13:

Eph 4:13 ...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

Ephesians 4:13

The aim of the work of ministry is unity of the faith, which is seen in our maturity, which is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In other words, maturity happens when we look like Jesus, and since this isn't a physical appearance, it must be that we think and act like Christ, which is another way to say we have the perspective of Christ. To have the perspective of Christ is to think and live and breathe gospel. Again, the gospel isn't a formula for how we get to heaven. Rather, it is the declaration of the victory of Christ. It is the proclamation of who he is and what he has done. It is living out this truth every moment of every day, resting in who he is and what he has done.

## Discipleship

In the coming verses Paul is going to instruct the Ephesians how to conduct their lives. They must put away lying and put away bitterness and they must avoid sexual immorality and they must not speak corrupting words, but words that build up others. These things are all important things, but after proclaiming the gospel of Jesus in great detail, what is the first command the apostle gives the church? Back up in verse 1: therefore, walk in a manner worthy of your calling, bear with one another, and maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The very first application of the gospel of Jesus isn't about your personal piety, your personal, individual holiness, your *private* walk with the Lord. We want to make following Jesus about our personal performance, but what does the apostle prioritize? Walking in faith *together*. Following Jesus is a *group effort*. It is something the whole church must do. It is so important that Paul says it is when *each part* works properly the body is made to grow.

We tend to think of discipleship as an individual effort. I've heard some claim they haven't been discipled because people aren't meeting with them weekly to ask them how their *personal walk* with Jesus is going. Why do we think that's discipleship? Quina Aragon explains the outcome of this understanding of discipleship.

If you're expecting discipleship to look like one spiritually mature person constantly offering you companionship, guidance, and accountability for every area and season of your life, then you will experience unnecessary disappointment.

Quina Aragon, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/never-been-discipled/>

Discipleship may *include* that, but what do you think is happening when we gather together on Sunday mornings and pray for one another and read Scripture and hear God's word taught and sing songs that point us to the Lord Jesus even as we sing to him? What do you think is happening when we meet at 9:00 to pray with and for one another? What do you think is happening when we meet in each other's homes for City Group—or just a meal? I'm not sure we fully grasp *how* we make disciples.

Discipleship happens as we *truth* together in love. Remember what the truth is: it is the gospel of the Lord Jesus, the faith that has been handed down to us. It is the one Lord, one *faith*, one baptism. It is life lived together in Christ. Discipleship isn't some *program* you go through. Discipleship is being continually pointed to the truth of God in Christ. Discipleship is the process of helping one another mature in Christ, that we, *his church*, may grow up in every way into him who is our Head—the Lord Jesus Christ. That's *discipleship*.

Indian scholar Idicheria Ninan describes what a mature church looks like:

Those growing to maturity, on the other hand, can distinguish between truth and error, and will have a lifestyle characterised by truth and love. Their growing knowledge of Christ will strengthen the entire body of which Christ is the *head*. As the head, he unifies the whole body, while all the individual parts of the body work together in love to sustain the body.

On the basis of this passage, a mature church can be described as one that honours Jesus as its authority and source and one in which the members accept one another with love, recognising their mutual dependence and their fundamental unity. They are able to discern truth from error and together have a correct understanding of the faith and of Christ. In such a church, the truth is proclaimed and people are constantly growing in their love and service of one another.

Idicheria Ninan, South Asia Bible Commentary

Because our culture so focuses on the individual, we want to determine our spiritual maturity and our level of holiness through the avoidance of personal sins. If we are growing in maturity we will do this, but that is not how we measure maturity in Christ! Before faith in Jesus Paul himself claimed he was blameless. He avoided sin! He claims he was *blameless* when it came to the law of Moses, yet he was utterly unlike Christ.

Do you see Paul's emphasis? We walk in a manner worthy of our calling by pursuing community in the church. We walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus by maintaining

the unity of the Spirit. We walk in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus by growing up into Christ so that each part of the body is working properly. The outcome of this is the body builds itself up in love.

## Love

The aim of discipleship is Christlikeness. The outcome of our salvation is not merely a destination when we die, but a transformation into the image of Christ. As Paul wrote in Romans, we have been “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”. He wrote to the Corinthians that we are being transformed into the image of the Lord “from one degree of glory to another”. In First John 3 John says when Jesus “appears we shall be like him”. That is, we will finally have reached the goal of our salvation, for we will be like Jesus.

What does that mean, though? What does it mean to be like Jesus? Again, this is where our culture wants to emphasize personal piety and personal holiness. We want to emphasize our individual selves, but as we’ve seen, this is what Paul means when he says we should no longer be *children*. Rather than pursuing our personal spiritual growth, we should be pursuing our *corporate* spiritual growth. Clinton Arnold is really helpful here:

It is ever so important to recognize that love is a social virtue and cannot be seen or manifested by living in isolation from other believers. God designed the church so that believers will live together as a family in community. While there has been a strong emphasis in contemporary Christianity on personal, individual spiritual growth, this can be easily overemphasized at the expense of the corporate emphasis of this passage. Many years ago, Calvin astutely commented, “That man is mistaken who desires his own separate spiritual growth. For what would it profit a leg or an arm if it grew to an enormous size?” Paul not only envisions a body of proportional growth, but a body that cannot grow properly without all believers receiving gifted input from all other members of the body.

Clinton Arnold, ECNT

The body of Christ cannot grow properly unless the whole body functions properly. The way in which we *function* is not through the assignment of tasks. Rather, it is through the giving of ourselves to one another as the gifts God has given to his church. When we give ourselves to one another by actively participating in the life of the church, notice what happens in verse 16: “when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love”.

As Clinton Arnold wrote, love is a social virtue and cannot be seen when a person is all by himself. Love is ever outward in focus. Love is the essential component of Christian community. Without love community cannot take place, at least not in any lasting, meaningful way. At its core, love is what it means to be like Christ.

Rom 5:7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—<sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:7–8



Paul says God's love is seen in this: while we were still sinners, that is, while we were hostile toward God and cared nothing about him, Christ gave himself for us, that he might reconcile us to God. This is the sort of love Paul means. The body builds itself up in love. The maturity of the body of Christ comes about as each part is working properly with the result that the church is built up in love. This love is a reconciling love that forgives wrongs and seeks what is in the other's best interest.

## Application

As the church builds itself up in love, it is continually *truthing in love*—proclaiming the gospel of Jesus. Remember how Paul prayed in chapter 3. He prayed that Christ would dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded *in love*, would have the strength to comprehend the enormity of the love of God to us in Christ, the fullest comprehension of which is beyond knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of Christ.

The only way to be filled with all the fullness of Christ is for his people to *truth in love*. That is, the entirety of our lives must proclaim the gospel of Jesus. The entirety of our lives, how we live among other people and even when we're alone, must be lived in light of who Jesus is and what he has done. This is how we *truth in love*. This happens in community, for it only in community that we can be fully formed into the image of Christ. Matt Sliger really nailed this idea:

If the ultimate goal for a trainee is to be like the mentor, then one-on-one discipleship is sufficient. However, if the goal for a trainee is to be like Jesus, then he needs mentoring by Jesus' body.

Matt Sliger, quoted by Phil Newton in "The Mentoring Church"

He doesn't need *part* of the body, but the *whole* body. In the body of Christ there are no vestigial organs. There are body parts we've discovered that we do not yet know the purpose of. These are often called vestigial organs. These may be parts of the body that once served an important function but as we've adapted are no longer needed. Or so we think. Scientists once thought the appendix and tonsils were vestigial—useless parts of the body. Now we know they are important to the immune system.

There are no parts of the body of Christ that are disposable or replaceable. It is when each part works properly that the body grows and builds itself up in love. This happens as we continue to point one another to the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Paul's point throughout this first half of chapter 4, his first point after proclaiming the gospel of Jesus in the first three chapters, is there are no unnecessary parts of the body of Christ. Each part must work properly. This is why we say Scripture expects a believer to be rooted in a local church. There are no free agents in the kingdom of God. The expectation of Scripture is that a follower of Christ would be committed and devoted to a church.

You cannot grow merely by listening to sermons online or reading books by yourself. You cannot grow up in Christ by yourself. It takes the whole body to make the body grow. It takes the whole body to proclaim the fullness of the gospel of Jesus. This is why each and every one of us is *essential*. We will not experience the fullness of Christ without the fullness of his body.