

9.29.19 ~ Ephesians 4:14-16, Growing up in Christ...

Let's first look at **Ephesians 4:11-13**, to refresh the context for today's passage. Pastor-Teachers are given to the Church as a gift from the Lord, for the purpose of equipping, exhorting and encouraging individual believers, overseeing God's Church, leading by serving, while holding fast to the Word of God, as revealed in the 66 Books of Scripture.

Read Ephesians 4:14-16. What if your hand, foot, spine, heart, and lungs grew at different rates? Your body would have a very hard time functioning properly, if at all. God in His sovereign wisdom has made our bodies to grow in a concerted fashion as the many bones, muscles, and organs develop simultaneously.

What if, at age 14 you still had 3 year old feet or a 1 year old brain? It wouldn't be good would it? Paul instructs us not to remain "infants." We are born into God's family with full rights, as full heirs; but we must grow and mature if we are to handle our inheritance in a manner that brings glory to God. Only those who mature spiritually can live with power and godly success (see **Joshua 1:8-9; Romans 12:1-2**).

Infants in the faith, whether it be chronological or self-imposed immaturity, do foolish things, they are unstable, and they are definitely unaware of the deceptive schemes of evil men.

Children don't have wisdom, instead, their head and heart are full of foolishness (**Proverbs 22:15**), "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him."

Growing up can be frustrating and painful, as the discipline of learning to distinguish between what is ultimately good and what is ultimately bad, often comes through experiences that bring consequences and/or rewards.

This is also true of the spiritually immature in Christ, who are ruled by self-pleasure and impulsiveness, all the while they are being tossed back and forth and blown here and there by every fad, trend, or nuisance of the culture that makes its way into the Church.

There are evil men who are trying to lead astray, take captive and destroy God's children; just as a turbulent sea, foaming and churning, takes control of a sailboat. **Isaiah 57:20**, "But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud."

A child caught in the undertow of a large wave doesn't stand much of a chance without a flotation device or a rescuer.

In the same way, children in the faith are easy marks for scheming deceivers, for children have neither the wisdom nor the strength to defend themselves.

Groups like the Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Moonies, B'hai, and the church of Scientology (to name just a few), are taking captive the minds and souls of young and/or immature people, through their cunning deceit and craftiness.

People easily follow charismatic leaders and religious gurus who profess to know the way to health, wealth and happiness. The unsaved and the spiritually immature are primary targets for those who serve the devil (cf. **2Corinthians 4:4; John 8:44**).

We are living in the "last days" and we have been since the coming of Christ. We see today a clear escalation of false teaching that rejects all that is holy and righteous and true.

2Timothy 3:12-13, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

2Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

God's family needs mature believers, for we are in a battle, and most of the world is against us. Jesus tells us (cf. **John 15:18**), that the world will hate those who follow Him, and this shouldn't surprise or discourage us, but it should caution us (cf. **James 4:4**), that the world is not our friend, in fact those who befriend the world are enemies of God.

If we are going to boldly and earnestly "speak the truth in love," we are going to face opposition in a world that rejects God's authority, and our faith will be tested; but this will develop in us, perseverance, that we might mature in Christ, being found complete, not lacking anything (cf. **James 1:3-4**).

Young children don't do well in struggle or suffering; nor can they evaluate or make wise judgments about deceitful schemes or dangerous philosophies; but then, neither do spiritually immature or worldly Christians, for they are incapable of wise discernment (see **1Corinthians 2:14-16; 1Corinthians 13:11**).

It takes effort, determination, and discipline to mature in Christ, that we might avoid the entrapments of the world and the cravings of our own flesh.

Hebrews 12:11, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Growing in Christ is not passive nor stagnant, nor is it without pain and struggle which are a necessary part of the growth process; but then, we will also experience

God's peace, pleasure and power. Sometimes growth is rapid, sometimes growth is slow, but the moment growth stops -- decay sets in.

God calls us to grow up through the Word of Truth, into the Character of Christ, we are not to remain infants. It is neglectful and unloving to let a fellow Christian remain an infant, and it is detrimental to the rest of the Body of Believers.

We must encourage and stimulate growth among those in the church, or we will end up with one big nursery and no one to take care of all those babies.

There is nothing wrong with being a baby in Christ, if you are newly born. But it would be awkward and burdensome at age 10, to still be crawling around, wearing diapers, and feeding from a baby bottle!

Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their stunted spiritual growth (**1Corinthians 3:1-2**), "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able."

Why had they not developed or matured, why was their growth so stunted? Perhaps Peter can shed some light on the problem (**1Peter 2:2-3**), "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

We must grow and mature properly in order to be able to discern good from evil, righteousness from unrighteousness; otherwise we might be deceived, bringing dishonor to God while suffering the consequences of our own stunted growth, due to poor diet and lack of exercise, spiritually speaking.

If we are to avoid being tossed back and forth or blown here and there, we must be deeply rooted in the Word of God, where we are anchored and gain wisdom and understanding, and we are to be serving and participating in a Bible believing and teaching church.

We need accountability to God, but also to one another; speaking the truth, in love, we will grow to maturity together under Christ, who is the Head of the Church.

Let us seek to honor God here on earth, by knowing and doing His will, for His glory and honor, and our mutual edification and benefit, as we grow up and work together in the Body of Christ [the Church], serving and encouraging one another, while living out and proclaiming the Message of Salvation through Jesus Christ alone; for we are one family, dearly loved by our Father in heaven.

Pastor Mike
>'(((><