

LESSON TWELVE

**THE WINDS OF TEACHING
&
THE GROWTH OF THE MEMBERS FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY**

Scripture Reading:

Eph. 4:13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Eph. 4:14 That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error,

Eph. 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

Eph. 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

Questions:

Section 1

1. What do the waves and winds in Eph. 4:14 refer to?
2. Why do we need to “be no longer little children” in verse 14?

Section 2

1. According to the context of the verses above, what is the test for whether something can be classified as “winds of teaching”?
2. What is the way to escape the winds of teaching?

Section 3

1. What does truth refer to? How to hold the truth in love?
2. Why did the winds of teaching cause us to be tossed about according to verse 14?
3. How does our love for one another cause us to hold the truth?

Section 4

1. How do we grow up into the head?
2. We need to grow up into the One who is the Head, what does it indicate?
3. What is the most difficult matter in which to grow up into Christ?

[Section 1]

Ephesians 4:13 says that we need to arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It is difficult to define these items adequately because they are all related to life and life is very mysterious. The real oneness in practicality is a matter of life. Likewise, the full-grown man and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ are matters of life. Only after our experience of life has reached a certain degree can we understand such a verse as 4:13.

In 4:13 Paul begins with the oneness of the faith. From my limited experience, I can say that the faith here refers to Christ with His redemptive work. Hence, the object of our Christian faith is the living Christ with His work.

Verse 13 also speaks of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Apparently there is little relationship between the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. According to our experience, however, the two are actually one, for both refer to Christ. The full knowledge of the Son of God is a matter of knowing Christ as life and everything to us. In the New Testament the Lord is called the Son of God in relation to life, but in relation to His commission He is called Christ. When Peter received the revelation regarding Christ, he said that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). Furthermore, in the Gospel of John we are told that we need to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the

Son of God (John 20:31). This means that we believe in the Lord Jesus for life and for His commission. To know the Lord's commission is rather easy, but to know Him as our life is quite difficult. This comes not by mere objective knowledge, but by experience. When we experience Christ as our life, we know Him as the Son of God. Then we have the experiential and practical oneness, that is, the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God.

God desires that Christ be everything to us. Christ is the object of our faith, and He is also our life. If we see this, we shall begin to lay aside whatever distracts us from Christ; we shall drop everything other than Christ Himself. How much we drop depends on our experience of Christ. The more we experience Christ as life, the more things we shall lay aside. In this way we arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God.

Today, because we are still short of the experience of life, we do not have the full realization of this practical oneness. But we are growing. We cannot say that we have arrived at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, or at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Nevertheless, we thank the Lord that, ... we are on the way toward this goal.

I. BABES IN CHRIST

Verse 14 says, “That we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness

with a view to a system of error.” This verse is the continuation of verse 13. The word “that,” which may also be rendered “in order that,” indicates that the result of arriving at the three things in verse 13 is that we are no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching. Therefore, arriving at the three things in verse 13 has a purpose, and this purpose is that we be no longer babes.

A. Those Lacking Maturity in Life

Babes are those believers who are young in Christ, who lack maturity in life (1 Cor. 3:1; 13:11; Heb. 5:13). In the first stage of our spiritual life, we Christians are all babes.

B. Tossed by Waves and Carried About by Winds

Verse 14 indicates that the babes are tossed by waves. The Christian life is like a journey on the sea, where there are many storms. As Christians, we should not expect our journey to be calm, with no waves or winds. The waves and the storms come not only upon individual believers, but even upon the church. There are times when the church experiences waves and is in the midst of storms. Paul’s concept here is not that we can avoid the waves and winds, but that we can be kept from being tossed by waves and carried about by winds.

Difficulties and hardships are different from waves and storms. Hardships are like rocks, and difficulties are like heavy weights that we must bear. Waves, on the contrary, often come in a pleasant, appealing way and even with a sweet, loving appearance. Most of those who are tossed by waves are not tossed against their will, but are tossed willingly by waves that seem most pleasant and enjoyable to them. As they are being tossed by the waves, they have no sense of danger. Rather, they may have a sense of excitement or enjoyment. Because waves may have such a pleasant appearance, they are quite different from hardships or difficulties. Actually, few Christians are tossed by difficulties, but many are tossed by waves and carried away by winds.

Perhaps you are wondering what the waves and the winds are. They are the various teachings, doctrines, concepts, and opinions. As the church is journeying on the sea, Satan will seek an opportunity to send in some appealing teachings, concepts, and opinions to entice the believers. His purpose in doing so is to carry them away from Christ and the church.

At the time of Paul, certain Judaizers taught the Old Testament in an enticing manner. Their teaching was related to certain practices that had been ordained by God in the Old Testament. It was difficult for the babes in Christ to discern the subtleties of these appealing teachings. The principle is the same today, but now there are even more distracting teachings, concepts, and opinions. All these have a pleasant and positive appearance. Otherwise, no one could be cheated by them. Thus, many today are being tossed by waves and carried about by winds of teaching.

A babe can easily be deceived or led astray. For example, children can be led away from home by someone who offers them candy or gum. Their love for candy causes them to forget everything else. Because many Christians are still babyish, desiring sugar-coated teachings, they are easily deceived.

The only way to escape from the waves and the winds is to grow in life. As you are growing, you need to hide under the covering of your parents in the Lord. Do not care for spiritual candies, but care for the way your parents in Christ are taking. In this way you will be preserved and safeguarded.

In the church life the young ones should hide under the shelter provided by the older ones. This covering is the best hiding place. On your own do not take in any concept, no matter how sweet it may seem. Whenever you are tempted in this way, you should say, “I don’t care for these sweet things. I care for Christ, for the church, and for the shelter of the older ones.” If you take in the candy, you will discover that there is poison under its sugar coating.

[Section 2]

By reading verse 14 in its context we see that the most reliable test to expose any deceptive teaching is Christ and the church. In his subtlety, the enemy, Satan, uses waves and winds to distract the saints from Christ and the church. At times, Satan will even use the Bible to do this. This indicates that even scriptural teachings may be used by Satan to carry us away from God’s purpose. Satan can use almost anything to distract us from Christ and the church. He used even the words of Scripture to tempt the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. There is no better safeguard than Christ with the church. Do not accept any teaching that cannot pass the test of Christ and the church.

Satan may even come to you with a teaching under the pretense that this teaching will help you to enjoy the church life more. However, when you take in such a teaching, you find that your appetite for the church life is actually nullified. Before you accepted that teaching, you were absolute for the church and for the church testimony; you desired to attend the meetings of the church and had a high regard for the ground of the church. But the subtle satanic teaching kills your desire for the meetings, dilutes your absoluteness for the church life, and causes you to disregard the church ground. As this teaching does its damaging work within your being, no longer do you care for the genuine testimony of the church; yet all the while you are convinced that, through the concept you have absorbed, you are on the way to a better church life. This is the most subtle doctrine of all! This subtle wind carries you away from the church life.

This kind of subtle teaching also causes you to lose your appetite for Christ. Through its influence, you are no longer as hungry and thirsty for Christ as you once were. You come to feel that it is religious or legal to love the Lord in an absolute way. All this is evidence that the poisonous essence of this satanic teaching has entered into your being and corrupted it, causing your spiritual senses to become dull. This is the most subtle way for a believer to be carried away from Christ and the genuine church life.

The only way to grow, to be protected, and to be covered is to stay in the proper church life. Do not place so much confidence in your personal sense about any situation. Certain teachings may cause you to feel that the church life is not very good or that it is even unnecessary. Through the years I have learned that we must always be on guard against any thought that the church is poor, wrong, or unnecessary. Such a thought is a clear sign that a wind of teaching is approaching. I do not claim that the church today is perfect. However, I do say that any negative thought about the condition of the church is an indication of the working of a subtle teaching. Such a teaching does not first appear to be threatening. It is usually concealed beneath a pleasant appearance. The color may at first be very appealing, but after this teaching enters into you, its color becomes darker as time goes by. This is a sign that this teaching is exerting a poisonous influence within you.

I say again that the only way to escape the waves and the winds is to grow. However, we cannot grow up overnight like a mushroom. Rather, we grow gradually little by little and day by day. As we are slowly growing in the Lord, we need to

remain under the protective covering of the church. Trust the church, not your individual, subjective feeling. Look to the Lord that He will cause you to place your trust in Him and in the church. This is necessary especially when, according to your feeling, the church is not so good. At the very time you feel the condition of the church is not positive, you should place your trust in the church all the more.

II. WINDS OF TEACHING

A. A Teaching That Differs from God's Economy

In verse 14 Paul does not speak of the wind of heresy, but he speaks of the wind of teaching. Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries them away from God's central purpose. First Timothy 1:3 and 4 reveal that some in Paul's time were teaching differently. This does not mean that they were teaching heresy; it means that they were teaching something different from God's New Testament economy. Their teaching was not the teaching of the New Testament ministry. In the New Testament there is one ministry. This ministry is the dispensing of the Triune God into the believers for the building up of the churches. We must beware of any teaching or supposed ministry that teaches something different from God's economy, that is, that teaches something other than God's dispensation for the building up of the churches.

As a whole, Christians today have been carried away by various winds of teaching. Every denomination or independent group is under the influence of some kind of doctrinal wind. What Christians today are not being tossed by waves or carried about by winds? We need to ask ourselves whether we are still under the influence of such waves and winds.

For example, some strongly disagree with immersion and advocate sprinkling. I can say to such a one, "Brother, I don't care for sprinkling, but I certainly care for you. I simply receive you as my brother in the Lord." By receiving him in this way, I am the same as he. But by insisting on sprinkling, he makes himself different from me. Therefore, he, not I, must bear the responsibility for any difference between us.

It is crucial that we have the clear vision that the New Testament economy is for nothing other than the dispensing of the Triune God into people for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is our goal and our testimony. It is also God's recovery. If we have this goal always before us,

we shall not receive any teaching, concept, or opinion that distracts us from the central lane of God's economy.

B. In the Sleight of Men

In verse 14 Paul speaks of the "sleight of men." The Greek word for sleight signifies the cheating of dice players. The teachings that become winds, carrying believers away from the central lane of Christ and the church, are a deception instigated by Satan in his subtlety and utilizing the sleight of men, in order to frustrate God's eternal purpose to build up the Body of Christ. No matter how good a teaching may appear to be, if it distracts us from Christ and the church, it is something of the sleight of men. The sleight of men is even worse than deceit, for not only is it false, but it also involves an evil plot. Even if a doctrine is scriptural, it may be utilized in such a wicked plot.

C. In Craftiness

In this verse Paul also mentions craftiness. This word indicates that a certain evil skill is involved. Hence, the sleight of men involves both the formulation of a plot and the use of skill to deceive.

D. With a View to a System of Error

Finally, Paul says, "With a view to a system of error." These teachings that divide are organized and systematized by Satan to cause serious error and thus damage the practical oneness of the Body life. The plot is apparently of man, but the system is of Satan. We have seen that God's economy is to dispense the Triune God into us for the building up of the Body of Christ. Satan hates this. Therefore, he uses teachings, concepts, doctrines, and opinions in craftiness as part of an evil plot to carry people away and eventually to lead them into a system of error. How devilish! May the Lord expose the subtlety of the enemy so that we may detect the system of error related to the deceitful teachings that are designed to distract the saints from Christ and the church life.

[Section 3]

Verse 15 says, "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ." The fact that Paul begins this verse with the word "but" indicates that the truth in verse 15 is in contrast to the sleight of men, the craftiness, and the system of error in verse 14. Holding to truth in love is in contrast to the sleight of men and error in verse 14. To be carried away

by the winds of teaching in the sleight of men unto a system of error is not holding to truth.

III. HOLDING TO TRUTH IN LOVE

There is some disagreement among translators concerning the rendering of the Greek word for "holding to." Some prefer the translation "speaking." Those who advocate this translation regard truth in verse 15 as that which is opposed to a lie. Hence, to them speaking the truth is in contrast to telling lies. I do not say that this understanding is wrong. However, if we consider this verse in its context, we shall see that in its spiritual meaning a great deal more is involved here than merely speaking truth instead of lies.

A. Truth

Truth here means things that are true. According to the context, it refers to Christ and His Body. Both are true things. We should hold to these true things in love so that we may grow up into Christ.

To hold the truth in love is to handle the truth in love. The word truth in verse 15 denotes that which is real. In this universe the real things, the true things, are Christ and the church. Only by speaking concerning Christ with the church do we actually handle the truth. This means that although we may refrain from telling lies, we still may not be speaking the truth. For example, certain reports in the newspapers may not be lies; however, these reports are not the truth, the reality. On the contrary, they are vanity. Anything apart from Christ with the church is a vanity and a falsehood. If I am a person without Christ, my very being is vanity. A person may be extremely wealthy and possess an abundance of material things, but if he does not have Christ, all those riches and material items are nothing but vanity. The book of Ecclesiastes says that all is vanity (1:2). Apart from Christ with the church, nothing is true, nothing is real. To those who love the Lord Jesus and who are for today's church life, the only reality in the universe is Christ with the church. Day by day, we may talk about many things. But if we do not speak concerning Christ and the church, we are handling vanity; we are not handling the truth.

Instead of being carried about by winds of teaching, we should handle the truth and embrace it. Suppose someone comes to you advocating a particular doctrine, such as the doctrine of foot-washing. Although his particular teaching may be true, even this true teaching can distract you from Christ and the proper church life. Thus, even something such as foot-washing may become a falsehood, a vanity. I know of a brother who

became distracted and eventually dissenting over this very thing. This indicates that we may talk about scriptural doctrines but still not be handling the truth.

The entire fourth chapter of Ephesians is a chapter of truth. The first item of truth in this chapter is the oneness in two aspects: the oneness of the Spirit and oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. If you truly desire to handle the truth and to speak the truth, you must care for the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Furthermore, you must take care of Christ, who is the center of God's New Testament economy. God's economy today is nothing less than Christ with His Body. However, many Christians care neither for the Head nor for the Body. Instead, they are occupied by secondary teachings. To neglect Christ as the Head and the church as the Body and to speak about secondary matters is not handling the truth. This is not the speaking of the truth; it is the speaking of vanity.

Holding to truth in love means to handle, embrace, and speak Christ with the church. Others may teach differently, emphasizing doctrines or opinions that distract people from Christ and the church. However, we should not speak in such a way. Rather, we should speak those things that bring us into contact with Christ and that build us up as the Body of Christ. To speak in this way is to handle the truth.

According to verse 14, the babes are tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by winds of teaching. No doubt these waves and winds refer to various teachings and practices. Although these teachings may be scriptural or fundamental, they do not minister Christ to people. Their effect is to distract people from Christ and the church. Others may be tossed or carried about by such teachings, but we must hold to the truth in love; that is, we must hold to Christ and the church. This is what we speak, and this is our fellowship. It should even be the focal point of our prayer.

B. Love

In verse 15, Paul says that we should hold to truth in love. This is the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow-members of His Body. The love here is not our love, but the love of God with which He first loved us. Now with the very love with which God has loved us, we love the Lord and one another. It is in such a love that we hold to the truth, that is, to Christ with His Body.

If we speak about things other than Christ and the church, we are not acting in love. We may not only waste time, but also bring in elements that are foreign to the Body. If we truly love others, we shall be exercised to hold the truth and speak concerning Christ and the church. Instead of being influenced by the winds of teaching, we shall hold to Christ and the church in love.

[Section 4]

II. GROWING UP

A. Into the Head, Christ

By holding to truth in love we grow up into Christ in all things. To be no longer babes (v. 14) we need to grow up into Christ. This is to have Christ increase in us in all things until we attain to a full-grown man (v. 13). The word Head here in verse 15 indicates that our growth in life with Christ should be the growth of the members in the Body under the Head.

The fact that we grow in Christ by holding to truth in love proves that holding to truth involves more than not telling lies. Do you believe that you can grow in Christ simply by telling the truth instead of lies? This is not what enables us to grow in Christ. There are a good number of unbelievers who are honest and who do not tell lies. Nevertheless, their speaking of the truth does not cause them to grow up in Christ.

To grow up into the Head means that we care only for Christ and the church. We grow by caring only for Christ and the church, that is, by handling truth in love. We do not grow by some kind of honesty or sincerity related to ethical behavior.

In this verse the matter of growth is specifically related to growing up into Christ, the Head, in all things. Verses 13 through 16 all point to the need for growth. If we would be a full-grown man, we need to grow. Likewise, if we would be no longer babes tossed to and fro and carried about, we also need to grow. But we should grow up into Christ, not up into ourselves or into something else apart from Christ.

Paul clearly says that we are to grow up into the One who is the Head. This indicates that our growth must be in the Body. In order to grow into the Head, we must surely be in the Body. Many Christians are apparently growing spiritually; however, their supposed growth is not in the Body. I have known some Christians who have actually become more dissenting as they have had this kind of growth. It seems that the more they grow, the more critical they become. When they

have relatively little growth, they are no problem in the church life. But as they grow, they become troublesome. This is an indication that their growth is not growth into the Head. As long as anyone's growth is not into the Head, it is not growth in the Body.

It is of great importance that Paul does not tell us to grow up into the Savior, into the Master, or into the Lord. He says specifically that we are to grow up into the Head. This can take place only in the Body. If you do not remain in the Body, you may have a certain kind of growth, but it will not be the growth into the Head.

B. In All Things

In verse 15 Paul tells us that we must grow up into the Head in all things. In certain aspects you have grown up into the Head, but in other aspects you probably have not. According to my experience, the most difficult matter in which to grow up into Christ, the Head, is in our talking. Psalm 141:3 says, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Because it is so hard for us to control our speaking, we should make this our prayer also. Whether you are young or old, a brother or a sister, this is an area in which all of us desperately need to grow up into Christ as the Head.

If we bring to the Lord this matter of growing up into Him in all things, we shall see that there are many small things in which we have not yet grown up into the Head. How much we still need to grow up into Christ! May this need for growth touch our heart and turn us afresh to the Lord.

III. OUT FROM THE HEAD

Verse 16 says, "Out from Whom all the Body, fitted and knit together through every joint of the supply, according to the operation in measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Our growth in life is to grow into the Head, Christ, but our function in the Body is to function out from Him. Firstly, we grow up into the Head. Then we have something which is out from the Head.

Verse 16 indicates that growth is not for individuals, but for the Body. Any growth that is not for the Body is not genuine. The words "each one part" refer to every member of the Body. Every member of the Body of Christ has its own measure, and this measure works for the growth of the Body. The Body causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and working parts. Both the joints of the supply and every single part with its measure are needed for the church to build itself up. The growth of the Body is the

increase of Christ in the church. This results in the Body building itself up.

A. Every Joint of the Supply

In this verse Paul speaks of "every joint of the supply." This refers to the specially gifted persons, such as those mentioned in verse 11. The article before the Greek word rendered "supply" is emphatic. It indicates that the supply should be a particular supply, the supply of Christ. As the leading ones, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers have the supply, the particular supply. Yes, we all can be today's sent ones. Nevertheless, among the saints there are those who have the particular supply. This supply is not common to all.

Once again we see the twofoldness of the truth in the Scriptures. It is correct to say that all the saints can do the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. However, not all have the particular supply spoken of in this verse. In the Body the leading ones are the joints with the particular supply.

B. Causing the Growth of the Body

If we read verse 16 carefully, we shall see that it says that all the Body causes the growth of the Body. This means that the Body grows by the Body itself. The Body makes the growth of the Body. It is not wrong for churches to invite certain ones to come to minister the Word to them. However, a local church is not built up in this way. A local church must grow by the local church itself. Even a very small church must grow by itself. If you cannot cause the church in your locality to grow, then you should not be there as the church. Do not expect that visits from those brothers who share in the ministry of the Word will cause the growth of the church in your locality.

Verse 16 speaks of the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. This indicates that a local church must build itself up in love through every joint of the supply and according to the operation of the measure of each one part. Those with the particular supply are not only in the Body as a whole, but also in the local churches, which are the practical expression of the one Body. Even if the number of saints in a church is very small, perhaps only fifteen, there will still be some with the particular supply. This should be an encouragement to every local church. Through the particular supply of the leading ones and through the operation in each part, the church will cause the growth of itself in love. In this way we shall see the growth of the

members for the building up of the Body of Christ.

References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 44 & 45