

Ephesians 4:13-16 by Wayne Barber

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Ephesians 4:13: THE GOAL OF EQUIPPING THE SAINTS by Dr. Wayne Barber

There is a thought in Ephesians 4:13 that completes Ephesians 4:12, the Goal of the Equipping of the Saints. What is the final goal? How do we know when we have reached that goal? We saw in Ephesians 4:12 that the gifted men God has given to the church are given a task. That task is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and also for the building up of the body of Christ. Now, how do we know when this project is complete?

Ephesians 4:13 tells us:

"until we all attain."

That little word "attain" is the Greek word *katantao*. It is used nine times in the book of Acts of a traveler who takes a journey and arrives at his destination. When you are equipped as saints, when the gifted members of the body are taught by the gifted men given to the body, and the body is equipped for the work of the ministry, you can know when you have reached the goal of all of that equipping. Paul is about to tell us what the goal is in the equipping and the building up of the body of Christ.

I am reminded of 1 Peter 4:10. It's speaking in the context of spiritual gifts, about grace:

"As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

The word "manifold," *poikilos*, means multi-colored grace of God. It is almost like God is the master artist. He takes individual believers and gives them a different colored grace. He gives them a gift that fits into the body of Christ. If you put all those colors up on a board, it wouldn't make a lot of sense. But when you begin to get believers equipped with the Word of God and believers who are functioning under the control of the Holy Spirit of God, all of a sudden all those different colored graces, all the different gifts, begin to blend. What you begin to see is not individuals with gifts; you begin to see the Lord Jesus Christ visibly made manifest through His body represented by the believers.

It is so much fun watching people discover their gifts. It takes you a little bit of time to watch the picture come together. But when you begin to see people get under the authority of the Word of God and become filled with the Spirit of God and controlled by the Spirit of God, watch God begin to develop ministries into their lives. You begin to watch them grow up and mature. It is one of the most beautiful things to watch people grow and reflect the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the body being built up and developing so that Christ can visibly be seen in that body.

In Ephesians 2:20 it says we are the household of God, the dwelling of God on this earth. That is why he prayed his prayer, as a matter of fact, in Ephesians 3:14-21. It's so we might become filled with the Spirit of God, empowered by the gifts and abilities God has given us, and so that Christ might be made visible in and through our lives.

Well, in Ephesians 4:13 of our text, the tapestry is now woven and the design clearly seen as to what all of this equipping and building up the body is all about...."until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

Now the **goal** that we are headed towards, the final end, the destination of all the equipping and the building up of the body of Christ is three-fold.

- First of all, it is unto the **unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God**
- Number two, it is unto a **mature man**, a perfect man.
- Number three, it is unto **the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ**.

How do you know when the body has reached the point that God?

Remember, we have the universal body of believers, the local body of believers and the individual believers. Keep that in mind as we move through this.

First of all, there is the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God

The ultimate spiritual target for the church begins with the unity of the faith. As in Eph 4:5, the word "faith" here with the definite article (tes), does not refer to one's belief at salvation (see discussion of "the faith"). It refers to the body of Christian truth. **The faith** is the gospel in its most complete form. When believers are properly taught and faithfully obeying Christ and allowing His Spirit to minister His gifts through them, then the inevitable result is the **unity of the faith**.

Let me give you an example of what doesn't reach that goal. If you have ever studied Scripture and you have studied the church of Corinth, you know that the church of Corinth was one of the biggest problem church in the New Testament. It is a little risky when you get into the book of Corinthians because everything Paul says is to correct an error that is taking place in that church. The church of Corinth is a good example of how disunity (remember, all of this is in preserving the unity of the spirit) occurs when believers are ignorant or disobedient of Scripture.

What were they doing in Corinth? There were several things. One was they were having a meal at the Lord's Supper. I mean, they thought it was great to bring everything to the church. Instead of understanding what it was all about, they were making a party out of the thing and completely obliterating its biblical meaning. Not only that, they were cursing God and saying they were speaking in other tongues. They were trying to recreate Pentecost at Corinth. The solution that the Apostle Paul gives to them is in 1 Corinthians 1:10:

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."

In other words, it is the doctrine that we adhere to that unifies us. When a person is growing in the Word, when a person is filled with the Spirit of God, the inevitable result of that will be a doctrinal unity, **the unity of the faith**. We must be united in the faith, in that which we hold to and in that which we believe.

I have never seen a person's devotion be pure when his doctrine was wrong. We live in America and every time you see something that looks like it is sincere, everybody thinks they must be right. Folks, I am telling you, if people don't hold to biblical doctrine in the sense and the context of the Christian church, what happens is somewhere down the road you always find where they are not as pure as you thought they were. If a man is not doctrinally right and correct, then his devotion is impure. If a person's devotion is pure, his doctrine will be correct. It is a **unity of the faith** that you come to when you are down on your knees, submitted to the Lordship of Christ, letting His Spirit minister those gifts through your life. There is something about an adherence to a proper doctrine. It is mentioned very precisely in Eph 4:4-6, in the seven essentials that are mentioned there. You begin to draw together based on what a person believes. If you are not doctrinally correct, most of the time you are devotionally impure, even though we may fool other people.

Unity of the faith is something God has to bring together with people who are submitted to His Spirit, understanding what they can't do and empowered by the Spirit so that their gifts are manifesting Christ and not themselves. There is a doctrinal unity that comes when that kind of thing happens.

You have many people sincerely doing a many things, and people mistake that sincerity for proper doctrine with proper devotion. If you've got the right devotion, you will have the right doctrine. If you don't believe it right now, hang on for a while. God will expose the impurities of that devotion somewhere down the road. This kind of unity, which we are striving for, is the goal that the church is headed for. It's when the church can join hands with the unity of doctrine and understand that it is Jesus being Jesus in us. It is His body. He wants to be made visible in us.

When we join hands in that way, this kind of unity will produce something else. It will produce **the knowledge of the Son of God**. He didn't say it will produce greater knowledge of the Word; that is going to be taking place anyway. Not only will you know the Word of God, but you get to know the God of the Word. It is a beautiful thing. The word "**knowledge**," epignosis, is the word that means participatory knowledge, full knowledge. In other words, what you have in your head starts sinking down in your heart. There comes that point in a person's surrender to Christ. That is the ultimate goal we are pushing towards. That is when we start growing up. That is when we start becoming what God wants us to be, when we begin to experience Him, not just know about Him. You get to know Him.

Let me ask you a question. Do you know Him? Do you walk with Him? Do you talk with Him? Do you see Him manifest Himself in your life? This is where you are headed. This is what unity of the faith produces. It produces the knowledge of the Son of God. You get to know Him and experience, as Paul said in Philippians 3:10, His power and His resurrection. You experience the fellowship of His sufferings. That is the intimacy that God is drawing us into when we come to that place of surrender to Him and He meets with us and we begin to experience Him on a personal basis. That is when you know it is working. It is not just your gift ministering to somebody. Oh, it is far beyond that. We come into the unity of the faith, and we don't argue over every Scripture. You see the Scriptures have become strangely inerrant and strangely understandable as we have bowed before the Lordship of Christ. All of a sudden we stand up, join hands and begin to experience the reality of Jesus in our personal lives. Now that is what the goal is. That

is the destiny. That is why it is so important to listen to his prayer in Eph 3:16 when Paul says, "That we might be strengthened in the inner man with His power like we have never known before."

Look over in Colossians. It is sort of the commentary on Ephesians. You can't say that in every passage, but it is certainly written from the same place, in the same prison. Paul says almost the same thing in Col 1:9-12+ in another prayer in chapter 1 of Colossians:

"For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

I want to summarize that. That is the Word of God right there. You will never know the Will of God apart from the Word of God. God will give it to you with spiritual understanding. God will give wisdom. Wisdom is the supernatural ability to take something written long ago and bring it up to date, bring it right into your life and show you practically how it applies.

The word "understanding" means to take all the facts, put them together, draw a line and come to a conclusion that is practical and workable in a person's life. Now Paul says in Colossians 1:10,

"I am praying for you that you might be filled up with this knowledge so that you may walk in a mannerworthy of the Lord, [that's the same phrase we find in Ephesians 4:1] to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

The word "increasing" means to grow in the knowledge of God. So when a person begins to come to the unity of faith, they are doctrinally holding on and embracing the same Christ, doctrinally holding on and embracing the same philosophy of ministry, doctrinally holding on and embracing that which God has said.

Something else happens. You begin to enter into the unity of that knowledge of the Son of God. When we are all living that way, that is the goal. We are getting closer and closer as we grow. Do you want to talk about having a praise time when we come to church? When we begin to worship Christ and surrender to Him, praise is the overflow. You just celebrate. But if a man has not worshipped and is not living that way, then he is not pushing toward the goal for which we are all supposed to be destined. So the goal is to be united in the faith, a doctrinal unity, but also in that doctrinal unity comes the knowledge of the Son of God. That also continues to unify as we experience His presence together.

Second, it says when we **attain** to a **mature man**. That is the goal for all of us. **The whole church as the universal body will never attain to it down here.** I wish it could, but it won't. We know that. But one day we will all be changed. God will take care of that. We are pressing towards that goal. The chance of attaining a **mature man** is a little bit better with the local body. As individual believers, we can get at least to the point where we begin to enter in to that which he is talking about.

What in the world is a mature man? The word is [teleios](#). It means that which has reached its end, that which is complete, that which is full, that which is lacking in nothing. This definition emphasizes something we need to understand. It emphasizes the continued growth that should ever be the pressing motivation of the believer. How many times have you had the tendency to compare yourself with somebody else in the body of Christ? "Well, Lord, I've done pretty good. Look at him. They have a whole lot more information than I have and look how they are doing. I am doing a whole lot better than they are." Friend, it is not a matter of competing with anybody. When we get saved, that is a beginning, not an end. We are to be growing in our faith. We are to be growing up in our faith. There is the word [teknon](#), which means little child. There is the word *huios*, which means son. We are to grow up and become mature sons of God to the point that we don't lack anything, to the point we find our completeness in the sufficiency of Christ.

Look at Eph 4:14:

"As a result, we are no longer to be children."

That is the whole thought. We are to grow up. So many people give their testimony and say, "I got saved 30 years ago." That is wonderful! But what is God doing in your life right now? If there has been no growth in 30 years, there was probably no birth 30 years ago because when you get saved you are growing, increasing, growing up to be a mature man. You are growing up to become the son that God wants us all to be. This goal is something that is in front of all of us.

Let me ask you a question.

**Are you going forward
or
Are you going backward?**

There is a prophecy against Israel and the prophecy says, "Since you have continually disobeyed me, you are no longer going

forward, you are now going backward." Has there ever been a time in your life when you loved Jesus more than you love Him right now? Has there ever been a time when you had a quiet time in your Christian walk that you couldn't wait to get into that you don't have anymore? Has there ever been a time in your life that you were thrilled at the things God was doing, but you are not thrilled anymore? Well, friend, you are going against the very grain of what Christianity is all about. It is pulling you to grow. You are going backward and not forward. We are to grow from where we are. Christianity is not static. It didn't happen back here and not effect us. It happened, so therefore, it completely effects us. We are to grow and become a mature person in Christ.

Well, finally the picture is complete in the last statement of Eph 4:13: "until we all attain... to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

God's great design for the church is that every member of the body of Christ be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. That is our goal. That is where we are headed. While we are down here in the quarry, God wants us to be growing that way. As I learn to be strengthened in the inner man, as I learn to obey God's will in my life, God is doing a transforming work in my heart. I get to know Christ. I get to walk with Christ, but I am moving towards something. I am being moved to the point that I am filled to the fullness of Christ. I begin to measure at some point. That is the goal, the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Romans 8:29 says that "whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren"

He has predestined us to become conformed into the image of His Son. Since the church is the presence of Christ in the world today, the goal is that we, the members of His body, come to the place that we are so filled with the fullness of Christ that we radiate Him everywhere we go. When we walk into a restaurant, when we get on a plane, when we are in a gas station, wherever we are, just radiate the person of Christ, filled up to the fullness of Christ. Christ is now manifesting Himself in our life.

1 John 2:6 tells us that we ought to walk as He walked.

"the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."

How did He walk? He walked in total submission to His Father. As Christ was to the Father, we are to be to Christ. As the Father was to Jesus, manifesting Himself, so Jesus will become to us. We reach the point where we are completely dominated by Christ. What fills us, remember, controls us. When others look at us and see Him in us, then we are reaching that goal that is ahead of us, the destiny of the fulness of Christ, the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (See onsite article related to Wayne's point - [The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#))

The bottom line in this passage is, we need each other to get there. That is why the gifts are given. No man gets there on his own. That is why the gifted men are given. We need to join hands united in faith, united in the knowledge of the Son of God, coming to a mature man. Then all of us can rise up, and when the world looks at us it will not see us, but Christ. We desperately need each other. If you are not living in the gift that God has given you and you are not ministering in that gift, we are being short-changed for the whole body to reach the stature of the fulness of Christ.

What is the unity of the Spirit? The unity of the Spirit is that which the Spirit alone produces. We preserve it. We don't produce it. He is the ligament that holds us together. As I begin to let His gift in me function, then I am reaching out to you and you are reaching to me. We are reaching out to each other through the unique gifts that God has given you and me. After a while, we have come to that unity of faith. Then we begin to experience Christ together like never before. Then we see the progression and begin to mature and grow up to the stature of the fulness of Christ. That is the goal. We need each other to get there.

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Ephesians 4:14: CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO ARE MATURE IN CHRIST

by Dr. Wayne Barber

Turn to Ephesians 4:14. There are certain characteristics about people who are mature in Jesus, who are surrendered to the Word. People who die daily to self, are obedient to what God says, and are walking by faith, experience the living presence of the fullness of Christ.

They have marks, certain characteristics which identify them. I want to look at one of them in verse 14. They are doctrinally stable. That is one of the first things you notice about somebody who is growing up in Christ. He is maturing. He has thrown away the pacifier. He is becoming an adult. He is growing into the fullness of Jesus. He is growing up. He is becoming mature. He is doctrinally stable.

Verse 14 is a powerful verse. Let me read it for you:

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming."

Paul wants us to realize what the mature are, so he takes us on a journey to see what the immature are like. We are not like this. Let's look at the immature so we can learn the characteristics of doctrinal stability in those who are mature in Christ Jesus.

Again in verse 14 he calls them children. We are to be no longer children. That's not *teknon*. It is not the word *huios*, for son. It is the word *nepios*. It is a word that means a little infant that can't even speak. He is absolutely totally helpless. They are cute, but they are helpless. As a matter of fact, they are carried about by the will and the whim of somebody else. They can't even tell you what they want. They are not intelligible enough to even carry on a conversation. Paul says we are no longer to be that way. When you are birthed into the family of God, you come in as an infant. You don't even know what to say. All you know is that you have received Jesus into your heart. Now, you are to grow out of that stage. You are to grow to a child, grow to an adult, and become full grown in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to no longer be children.

He gives two characteristics of children, immature people. They are people who have not allowed themselves to be equipped. They are people who say, "I would rather do church than be equipped under the Word of God." They don't understand how all this process fits together. These people are children. He gives two characteristics that mark a child. Both of them have to do with total helplessness and instability.

Paul says in Eph 4:14 that "we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves."

The story is told of a little boy whose mama put him to bed one night. Johnny got in bed and she went downstairs to read for a while. About 30 minutes later she heard a big thump on the floor. She knew exactly what happened—he had fallen out of bed again. She went upstairs and Johnny was sitting in the middle of the floor really bewildered. He had been asleep and had fallen out of the bed. She asked, "Johnny, what happened?" He said, "Mama, I don't know. I guess I just stayed too close to where I got in."

You see, spiritual children are those who have stayed too close to where they got in. For that reason, they are helpless and not stable when it comes to the whims of false doctrine that are around them. That first phrase, "tossed here and there by waves," has an idea attached to it. Ephesus was a seaport city, so these people would understand what Paul was talking about. He is using terms that anybody would understand if they had ever been around the water.

Once I was on the coast in Cape Town, South Africa. I stood in my room and looked out at two people who were trying to walk into the water. Now that was odd because the water was cold. I couldn't understand why they would want to get into the water. They walked down into the water. The waves were as big as I had ever seen them. I kept thinking, "I wonder if they are going to be able to stand up when those waves come crashing in." They couldn't. It knocked one of them down and the other one was knocked off balance. He reached to grab the other person. The sand underneath them was shifting and there was nothing stable to stand on. The waves were coming in and crashing all around them, and they were tossed this way and that way.

A person who is not being equipped has misunderstood the whole process. They don't understand the gifted men, and they don't understand the gifts in the body. They don't understand how the Word is to lead them to Jesus, building their faith and their knowledge of Him. These people are very unstable. They have nothing to stand on when the waves of false doctrine come crashing into their lives.

When you find believers who either through the fact that a pastor has not done what God has assigned him to do or he has been unwilling to be equipped in the Word, that individual becomes very unstable and is standing on shifting sand. He is a target for every wave of false doctrine that comes his way.

One of the first characteristics of a person growing up in Christ is that he is mature doctrinally. He is stable doctrinally. He knows what the Word of God says and he is not moved by every whim and fancy that comes his way.

Then Paul uses another term that really shows again the instability of an individual who is not mature in Christ. He says, "and carried about by every wind of doctrine." Now here the picture changes. Whereas in one instance the wave is tossing him here and tossing him there, now it is the wind and the wind is carrying him wherever it wants him to go. The picture I get in my mind is of a ship, like in James when it talks about the winds of doctrine carrying a ship the way it wants to take it. The only way a ship can be blown off course is when it has a broken rudder or no rudder at all. It is the rudder that steers the ship. But when something is wrong with that rudder, it has no path, no course, and whatever direction the winds blow, it will go that way. The winds will pick it up and carry it as if it has no will of its own.

That is a tragic picture of an infant in Christ. It is a tragic picture of some people who will not be equipped. They will not die to self.

They continually let the Word stay out of their lives and they are unstable. They are on shifting sand. The apostle Paul had already warned the Ephesians of false doctrine. This is something that has just sort of caught my attention. Remember before he ever went to Jerusalem? This was five or six years before the writing of the book of Ephesians. Before he ever went to Jerusalem, where all the trouble started, he called to himself, on the island of Miletus, the elders of the church of Ephesus. Remember the problem? He was trying to tell them, "Guys, I am warning you. False teachers are coming your way." The only way to combat false doctrine is when you are growing in your faith and growing in your knowledge of the Son of God. As you are obeying and surrendering to Him in the Word, in the Word, in the Word, under the Word and the Word is getting into you, then you are stable. You know what you believe. You know what the scriptures have to say.

Look over at Acts 20 and let's look at when Paul warned the Ephesian elders about what was about to happen in their midst. In Acts 20:28-31 Paul was really burdened. He loved these people. He knew if he stopped at Ephesus, he would stay too long because he was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, so he called them down to where he was on the island of Miletus. In Acts 20:28 Paul says:

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

The Word, the Word, the Word

How do you shepherd? You guide. You graze. You guard the sheep. How do you do that? The Word of God accomplishes all three. You guide them with the Word. You guard them with the Word. You graze them in the Word. The Word, the Word, the Word. That is the task of gifted men. To equip the saints so they can grow into maturity.

Continuing in Acts 20:29 Paul says: "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock."

The word "savage" there is the word *barus*, which means burdensome in the context. In other words, there are going to be people who come along and add law to grace. Paul is saying, "*Oh, man, guard yourself! False teachers are going to come in.*" By the way, he mentions not one wolf but wolves plural which is important. Did you know wolves do not travel by themselves? They travel in packs. Paul is saying in verse 29, "They will come in among you."

In Acts 20:30 Paul says, "and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

He shows you the wolves are men, and the men are false teachers. Then he shows you that they are already around you. Wolves will lie in wait for a prey sometimes for three days and never move, never eat, never do anything until they can find the precise moment to move. They always pick the weak. They always pick the easy, the young and the tender. They love to prey upon them. Paul says, "Listen, guard the doctrine. Guard the doctrine. Make sure you equip the saints. Make sure they grow up and become mature. Make sure they are going to become doctrinally stable because false wolves are going to make their move on the little flock God has given to you."

I was studying this and the thought really hit me. Do you realize right here in your congregation there are possibly some wolves you don't know about? Paul says they are already among you. He said they are going to come in on you, but he also said they are going to come out from among you. This is exactly what Simon Peter says over in his epistle. They are already here. They are the people who are not growing in the Word, who are not up under the teaching of the Word, and are not willing to obey. Their faith, their knowledge of God is non-existent. They live as if they can do it themselves. They cry out to God when they have a problem in their family. They cry out to God when there is a financial crunch. But they don't live daily, moment by moment, confessing flesh, realizing what they can't but what God can do in and through their lives. They are in every congregation in the world. They are planted there. They are where you are. Be careful if you are not growing in Christ and mature. You cannot spot them and you become easy prey for savage wolves to carry you off and to throw you here and to throw you there by every wind of doctrine.

In Ephesians 4:14, Paul not only tells you the two characteristics of children, which show how unstable they are and what a target they are for false doctrine, but he shows you the tactics the false teachers are going to use on them. I want you to see them because they are so camouflaged. If you are not growing in Christ, you can't spot them. Let me show you.

First of all he says, "by the trickery of men." The word "trickery" there is the word for cube. Actually it refers to dice. He has in mind the deception that a gambler uses to cheat you out of what is rightfully yours. That is exactly what a false teacher does. They are good, folks. They know what they are doing. They know what pleases flesh. They know what you want to hear and they will say it and say it and say it and say until they lure you into the trap of cheating you out of your victory in your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a matter of fact in 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter talks about the trickery of men and how they deceive you.

"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will

secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves."

They are not going to do it in the open. They are smarter than that. They know how to do it. If you are reading this, we already know your tactic. You are going to introduce it secretly. You are going to say 80% of what everybody else is saying. You are going to take the 20% that is error, lay it side by side, and win the people with your personality. When they are not looking, you are going to pick up the error and because they like you, they are going to think it is truth. They secretly introduce destructive heresy. Oh, they are out front. They know very well the spiritually mature can spot them. They come in secretly.

It scares me all the time. I think if I have any fear it is the fear of false doctrine getting into our church body. I think nothing else really bothers me as much as that one thing right there. goes on to say,

"even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves."

Now these are deceptive teachers, not deceived Christian teachers. They are deceptive people. They don't know Christ.

It goes on in verse 2,

"And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in *their* greed, they will exploit with false words."

The word for "false words" there is the word we get the word "plastic" from.

The second thing he says about their tactic in Ephesians 4:14 is,

"by craftiness in deceitful scheming."

That word "craftiness" is a word that could be translated "subtlety." These people are subtle, folks. You don't spot them right off. They can come in among you and you will not even know it for months. They are subtle. They know what they are doing. 2 Corinthians 11:3 uses the same word to describe the devil when he approached Eve as a serpent in the garden in Genesis 2 and 3. Paul writes...

"But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Remember what he did to Eve? The serpent got Eve's focus on what he was saying rather than what God had said. He got her confused and as a result of that, the fall of all men came. It is the same exact word. It is the word used in Luke 20 when the enemies of Jesus tried to trap Him in a plot by asking Him a leading question.

22 "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 23 But He detected their trickery and said to them, 24 "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's." 25 And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"

They were hoping He would say no and they could trap Him. But Jesus realized it was a scheme. He realized it was a method to try to get Him to fall.

"Deceitful scheming" has the meaning of those who lie in wait to deceive with that which is false. The word "scheming" there in verse 14 is the word *methodeia*, which is where we get the word "methods" from. It is the same word used in Ephesians 6:11 when it says

"Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil."

This is the word we need to become acquainted with. The devil has his schemes. He has his ways. He has his methods. Many people ask, "How in the world can the church be so divided today?" Have you ever asked that question. You can go to six churches and hear six different things. I think it all goes back to properly equipping people in the Word of God, with a relationship to Christ, dying daily to sin and understanding that faith and knowledge must work together to bring a person into maturity in Christ. As a result, since they haven't been taught, false doctrine easily finds its way to prey on the immature.

Folks, what I am trying to tell you is, if you are not growing and being equipped in the Word of God, if your walk with God is not one of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, if you are not growing into maturity, you are dead.

I want to tell you something. There are people who are enemies of the cross of Jesus. There are people sitting among us. There are people who will not get up under the Lordship of Jesus and for that reason, they have become targets for all the deception you can think of. Talk about confused minds when it comes to the Word of God! The mature in Christ are doctrinally stable.

I want to tell you something, friend, if you are not growing and being equipped in the Word of God and your gifts are useable in the

function of the building up of the body of Christ, you've probably already been suckered by false doctrine. 1 Corinthians 2 says the spiritual man examines all things by the Word of God. If you don't know it, you can't examine it. You have to become doctrinally stable when you become mature in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Ephesians 4:15: CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO ARE MATURE IN CHRIST—PART 2

by Dr. Wayne Barber

Paul is making a contrast. He wants us to understand the difference between the mature in Christ and the immature in Christ. They are all believers, all children of God. Some have stayed in the nursery and some are growing up.

The first characteristic he mentions is in verse 14. The purpose we all have is to grow up in Christ. Salvation is the beginning, not an end. The first characteristic of those who are growing up and maturing in Christ is that they have a doctrinal stability. Let's read the verse again. Verse 14 says,

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine."

In other words, those who are growing up in Christ, who are allowing His Word to get into their minds and into their hearts, who are obeying it, studying it, living it, and believing it, are those who are not thrown this way and thrown that way by all the different winds and waves of doctrine that are coming our way in these days. They understand truth. They stand on truth. They are not misled by the false teachers of this world. They are aware that the devil wants their mind. Did you know that? The devil wants your mind. People are always worrying, "Can he get in my heart?" Friend, he just wants you to believe the false doctrine that he has for you. As Proverbs says, "As a man thinks so is he." The mature know that. They give their minds to the Lord Jesus. They let truth renew their minds, therefore, transforming their lives. They are on the lookout for the trickery of men and the craftiness in their scheming.

False teachers are not looking for lost people. You will not find them in the ghettos. You will not find them where the needs of this world are. You see, false teachers have nothing to offer a person like that. They are not looking for the lost. They are looking for the infant children of God. They are looking for the immature in churches all over our country. Statistics show that the congregations of the cults are filled with those who used to be on church rolls. The mature are not that way. They know God's Word and are not deceived by false truth. The mature in Christ examine everything by the Word of God, as 1 Corinthians 2 tells us.

I have been thinking about the deceitfulness of Satan. He seems to be winning the minds of people all over the world. It seems like he is winning the battle. It is overwhelming how he is beginning to take away the minds of people everywhere you go. Revelation 12:9 describes the devil as the one who deceives the whole world.

"And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who **deceives** the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."

That word "deceives" is an interesting word. It means you really do think it is right. You turn towards it and are led astray. Scripture says there is a way that seems right; that way leads to destruction. That is the devil. He is the deceiver of the whole world. In John 8:44 Jesus is speaking to the religious lost and says,

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Folks, please hear those words. The devil is a liar and the father of lies. If we are not growing in Christ, if the Word of God is not getting into our life and hearts, if we are not obeying it, then friends, we have believed a lie.

Let's look at the second characteristic as we move into verse 15. Secondly, the mature in Christ have a doctrinal sensitivity. They don't just know it, they believe it and are sensitive to allow it to permeate every fiber of their being. It says in verse 15:

"but speaking the **truth** in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ."

I think I need to back up and explain you the phrase "speaking the truth." It comes from one Greek word. The word is *laetheuo*. It is a present active participle. In other words, it is something you do that is a lifestyle. It is consistent every single day. Now, it does not, unless the context permits it, exclusively mean speak the truth. You see the word simply means to express or to confirm the truth. We are being contrasted to the little children of verse 14 who are easily led this way and easily led that way. Paul is saying, "Oh, no.

The mature are not that way. They are doctrinally stable and doctrinally sensitive." In other words, every thing they do is a confirmation and an expression of what truth means in their life. To translate it, "speaking the truth in love" excludes too many other things and compares us with the false teachers of verse 14. We are not being compared to false teachers. We are being compared to immature children. So when he says, "speaking the truth" the idea is more than just speaking the truth. It is to confirm it. It is to express it. It is to validate the truth by everything that we do in our life.

You see the people who are doctrinally stable are the people who are doctrinally sensitive. It is not just that they know the truth, they hold to it, they cling to it, and they live in it. They express it and confirm it in every area of their life.

The word "truth" appears several times in Ephesians and tells us why we need to hold to it and walk in what the truth of God really is. Turn back to 1:13. We find that truth contains the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. We wouldn't be saved if it were not for truth. That is why we love it. That is why we want to confirm and express it in everything that we do. It says,

"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of **truth**, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

You see, truth has had a profound effect on the people who are growing up into Christ.

If you will look in Ephesians 4:21, you find something else. You find that all truth finds its source in Jesus Christ. Paul says,

"if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as **truth** is in Jesus."

The source of all truth is in Christ. You have to get the picture here. When I bow to Him, I also bow to His Word.

Look at Ephesians 4:24...

"and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the **truth**."

We find here that truth is the main fabric of the new garment that we are to put on in Christ.

In Colossians Paul writes that you have already put on the new self. Ephesians says, now put Him on. I love the aorist tense. It means "having put on, put Him on. Put Him on by conscious choice every day of your life." He says,

"put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the **truth**."

You mean to tell me that everything He is, that truth, permeates the way I think, the way I speak, and the way I am? Do you mean it effects my very lifestyle? Yes. I choose against my flesh and I choose to put Him on.

The word means to take off something and to put something on. Daily I say,

"Lord Jesus, I want Jesus to be Jesus in me. I choose against myself. The world has had enough of me. I want them to look at me and see Jesus and I put Him on."

It effects my lifestyle, and truth is the main fabric of that lifestyle. It is honesty, that which is without deception. It is everything that comes right out of the source of the Lord Jesus and the source of His Word.

In Ephesians 4:25 truth even determines what is to be spoken. Here is where you find "speaking truth:"

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak **truth**, each one *of you*, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

You can trust people who are being effected by the truth. Why? Because it just exudes out of them. It is a part of the fabric of who they are. It even effects the way they speak to one another.

In Ephesians 5:9, it is the fruit of our new life in Christ. Go back to verse 7 and catch the whole sentence.

"7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and **truth**)"

I want to tell you one more thing about truth from Ephesians 6:14. In our warfare against the devil, in all the schemes and the wiles that he has, if we want to be protected today, we need to...

"Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH **TRUTH**, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

Truth makes up everything that we are. It has to do with the inner purity of our life. It comes out in our actions. It comes out in our speech. It comes out in our thinking.

Truth has got to effect us if we are going to mature in the Lord Jesus Christ. It not only stabilizes us, it sensitizes us. The sphere in which truth is expressed and confirmed is in the sphere of love.

Again, look at Ephesians 4:15: "but speaking the truth in love." You know the meaning of that word for love. It is far beyond emotional things. It is not that we feel like it. It is a committed love. In other words, people who are mature are profoundly effected by truth and now they are committed to it. They are so committed to it that it is even beyond feelings. They are going to live it out so the world can look at their lives and have no doubt. The world will say, "Yes, they know who Jesus is. They have met Him. He lives in them. You can see it by the way that they live."

That is the person who is doctrinally sensitive. The lifestyles of the mature in Christ are radically different than those of the immature. The mature are stabilized by doctrine. They are not misled, tossed here and there by all the winds and waves of doctrine. They are sensitive to doctrine. They allow it to filter into their life and allow it to be expressed in every area of their life. They, by their very lives, are confirming and expressing truth. Sometimes you can speak it well and it still not be confirmed. The word there means to express and confirm it much more than just speaking it. Confirm it by the way you live.

You say, "Why is it that some believers are immature and won't grow up in Christ? Is there a reason we can find in the book of Ephesians?" I think there is. I want you to look back with me in chapter 3. There is a prayer that Paul prays in the middle of the book that sums up chapters 1, 2 and 3 and sets up chapters 4, 5 and 6. I want to keep going back to it because it has everything to do with what he is talking about in chapter 4. Why is it that some people just don't grow up? Where are they missing it? What is the problem? Look at 3:17. I want to remind you of something. He says: "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

The word "dwell" means to be made to feel at home. My purpose every day in order to grow up in Christ is to make Jesus at home in my heart, to accommodate Him, to make Him feel like He is welcome in my heart. How do I do that? I do that by my faith. What is faith?

"Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God."

In other words, if I say I have faith in this area, it means I believe what God says concerning that area. If I am not willing to obey Him in that room of my life, then I am curtailing my growth and I am not growing up and maturing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Three "Areas" of our Hearts:

Thoughts

Attitudes

Emotions

Do you remember the different "areas" of our hearts? There was the area of our thoughts. In Luke 9:47 Jesus said,

"But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side"

Is He pleased with what you are thinking about? 2 Corinthians 10:5 says,

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are **taking every thought captive** to the obedience of Christ"

"Oh, come on. Christianity is not that radical." Yes, it is if you have a high view of Christ. Yes, it is if you have a high view of Scripture. Even thoughts are to be taken into captivity of the obedience of Christ.

If you are not growing into Christ, the Word of God is not a part of your daily life, the Word of God is not permeating what you are thinking, then obviously you are still in the nursery. No wonder you are so confused and disillusioned when you ought to be celebrating the One who has come to liberate us from ourselves.

There was also the room of our attitudes Matthew 18:35, Jesus says,

"So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart".

"You mean to tell me, Wayne, that my attitude towards somebody in my family even can affect my whole life?" Absolutely. Oh folks, if you are not forgiving to somebody in your life, then evidently you haven't trusted the Christ who is truth, you haven't trusted His Word which is truth, and you don't believe He can forgive in and through you.

Thirdly, there was the room of our emotions. I want to tell you something, folks, emotions are triggered by many things.

Did you know there are basically three root areas of sin? There is the area of **immorality**. Do you think that doesn't effect your emotions? There are a lot of Christians who have not let the Word of the truth of God cleanse their mind of all of the immoral thoughts and things that are there. They are allowing themselves to be controlled by the affections of their emotions, and they have robbed themselves of every single joy Jesus could have brought into their life.

But immorality is not the only area. We are so critical of people who are immoral if we are not that way. There is another area. It is **covetousness** of things... money. That is another root. Some people who are not bothered by immoral things are really affected by the material things in life. Some people have the root of sin in that area. They love it. They can't stand it when somebody has more than they have.

The third root area of sin is **anger and bitterness and wrong attitudes** towards people. You are going to fall in one of those three or all three. Most of the time it is just one. Hebrews says, "Lay aside the sin that does so easily beset you." I guarantee you, somehow in our thoughts and our attitudes and our emotions, it is all tied in. We don't trust Him to bring something better into the rooms of our hearts, the room of our secrets.

Sometimes the little things that I hear overwhelm me. I begin to wonder, "What in the world are the secret sins that are hidden even in our churches?" I am even afraid to approach it. What is there that people won't let Jesus, who has been resurrected and glorified, come in and rule and reign in that area of their life? They won't confess it, and they won't let truth profoundly effect that area of their life.

Friend, the freedom I have today is that Jesus is dwelling in my heart by faith and setting me free from myself. Are you free? A person who is maturing is a person who is not only doctrinally stable, but he is doctrinally sensitive, sensitive to the Christ that lives in him, the truth that lives in him, to let Him permeate and live in his life. He has a high view of Christ and a high view of His Word and a high view of salvation. He shouts when he thinks about Jesus coming to this earth to set him free from himself.

Not only is he doctrinally stable and doctrinally sensitive, but thirdly, he is doctrinally stimulated. Look in Ephesians 4:15:

"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him."

I want you to see what he is saying here. This, to me, is really exciting. You see, once you get in the Word and let the Word get into you and let Jesus fill all the areas of your life and start obeying Him in these different areas of your life, you start growing in Christ.

Let me show you what happens. When you start growing into somebody, less of you is seen and more of Him is being seen. In other words, you are being filled to the fullness of God, which is back in another chapter. In other words, everything that fills Him now fills you and when people see you, they see Him because you are growing into Him. Your identity is in Him, and the Word is the root of every bit of it. That is why God gave gifted men to the body to equip them. Why? So that each individual can start growing up, become doctrinally stable, doctrinally sensitive and doctrinally stimulated. They begin to be stimulated into growing into Christ.

When you grow into Him, it is not you anymore. What fills Him fills you, and it is Christ being seen in your life. It is not just knowing the Word of God. If you will remember correctly, the church of Ephesus was warned of false doctrine. Did they heed the warning? Yes, sir, they did. In Revelation 2 he wrote another letter to them through the Apostle John and what did he tell them? You are doctrinally straight. But what was their problem? They had left their first love. Isn't it incredible? You can be doctrinally stable and still be doctrinally insensitive. If you are not letting truth change your life, confirm it, express it by everything you do, and "truth in love," then you are not growing into Christ. If you are not growing into Christ, when people see you they see you, they don't see Him. But by growing into Christ, people begin to see the Christ that lives in our life.

People who are maturing in Christ are distinctively different. They are contrasted to people who are not growing into Christ. Oh, it is a big difference.

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Ephesians 4:16: CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO ARE MATURE IN CHRIST—Part 3

by Dr. Wayne Barber

There has been a principle around since the beginning of time, as we know it. That principle is, when you have the whole made up of many parts, each part influences that whole. That is a principle that we all have known in life. When you have a football team, every player has to play to his best ability. He has to fully, properly function or the team will not win or do as it should.

When you have a complex machine, if every part does not function properly, it can even lead to devastating results. I remember

several years ago when the Challenger space shuttle going up. You remember what happened as it lifted off. I heard about the explosion and about the horrible tragedy of that event. The only thing that was wrong was an o-ring on the fuel tank had malfunctioned. It didn't work properly. The computer system of the shuttle was fine. The pilots, everybody in the crew were fine. Everything else seemed to be in good order. One part did not function and it devastated the whole.

When you look at your human body, think about the fact that we are made up of all kinds of organs. I can have the greatest heart in the world, but if I have a liver that doesn't work or function properly, it devastates the whole unit.

So you see, when you have the whole and you have different parts, each part either directly or indirectly, by its reaction and its function, affects the whole. I am saying all that because I believe this is on Paul's mind in Ephesians 4:16. What he is doing here is giving an illustration of how the body grows up into maturity, how it becomes built up into Christ. He wants us to see this. He has already given us a description of what the end result is like in verses 14 and 15. When a person is mature, he is doctrinally stable. When a person is mature and the body is mature, they are doctrinally sensitive. They are doctrinally stimulated. Now he wants to illustrate how all of that maturity is reached.

Let's read verses 14 through 16 so we see the complete thought:

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

I want us to be challenged with an urgency to see this verse fulfilled in each of our lives. You see, for the whole body to mature, the individual parts have to be maturing. The parts affect the whole. We need to see this. All of us individually need to say, "God, I want to be growing. I want to be maturing in Christ so that I can have that positive effect upon the whole body of Christ so that the body of Christ will not be ashamed when Jesus comes for His church." If we will all grow up in Him in all aspects into Him, then we will have a positive effect on seeing the whole body of Christ come to maturity.

There are three things in a progression that I see in verse 16 of how this takes place. First of all, in order for this to happen, you and I both have to see our responsibility to each other. Paul says in verse 16, "From whom the whole body." Literally it is "out of whom all of the body." It is the same thing. He speaks of the body representing the whole made up of many individual parts. We have to realize we are a part of a bigger thing. We are just a portion of the whole body of Christ. So often we think of ourselves as an island unto ourselves without realizing that we are only a part of the whole. As we will see in our text, my individual right or wrong responses, whichever it is, is either positively or negatively affecting the whole. We have to understand that. You and I cannot live like we want to live and escape the fact that the way we live is going to affect the body of Christ.

Let me take you back to the Old Testament to Numbers 12. A situation arose. It started with a woman, Miriam. Miriam went to her brother, Aaron, and as a result, a huge problem developed. Look at the Scripture in Numbers 12:1.

"Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); and they said, 'Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?'"

Their whole problem was they didn't like something Moses had done. So they began to gripe and complain, and the Lord heard it. That is a good thing for us to remember. We may not think anybody hears what we say in criticism or whatever, but God hears it. When you walk and grow in the Spirit, those things need to be confessed.

Numbers 12:3 continues,

"Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth. And suddenly the Lord said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, 'You three come out to the tent of meeting.' So the three of them came out."

Now that is an awesome thing here. God said, "I want to talk to all three of you. Miriam, Aaron, Moses. Come out and talk to me at the tent of meeting."

Numbers 12:5-8 continues

"Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, He said, 'Hear now My words: if there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so, with My servant Moses, he is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in

dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?"

God was saying, "Listen, he is not like a normal prophet. He is a friend of mine. I speak to him face to face. Why were you not afraid to speak against him?"

Numbers 12:9-14 reads,

"So the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed. But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she was leprous. Then Aaron said to Moses, 'Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account this sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!' And Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, 'O God, heal her, I pray!' But the Lord said to Moses, 'If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days?' That was a practice at that time. 'Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again.'"

We have read 14 verses, and we really haven't gotten to the point. Here is a person's sin. She has affected Aaron. Aaron and Miriam murmured against Moses. We have not yet seen the devastation of it. Look in Numbers 12:15.

"So Miriam was shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again."

Here is one person's sin affecting another and then a million and a half people being held back for seven whole days until that person's sin has been dealt with. You see what we do and how we live affects the whole. We may never know the devastation we have brought to the whole by the way we refuse to be filled with the Spirit or by the way we choose to be filled with the Spirit. All of our decisions to obey and to surrender to Christ affect the whole body of Christ.

Jesus was asked in Matthew 6:9 by the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." The Lord Jesus said,

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our (not "My Father") Father Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name."

You see, you have to realize we are not by ourselves. We are all a part of a whole. Even when you pray, God is going to answer your prayer not just for you, but how it affects the whole. We are parts of a whole. Please understand that. The way you live is going to affect the universal church. Your decision is so key in all of this. We must realize how we are either positively or negatively affecting the body of Christ.

Let me ask you a question. If you look back over the last year of your life, would the records that are kept in heaven by the Lord Himself said,

"Yes, last year that individual positively affected the maturing and the growth of the whole body down here on this earth."

Or would you say that the Lord had to say with grief,

"No, not much that they did was in honor of Me. As a matter of fact, look at the damage they did by their refusal to obey me."

Our choices, our decisions, our actions affect the whole. Every part has to function properly or the whole will not reach its desired maturity.

Ephesians 4:16 says,

"From whom the whole body."

So the first thing we must do is to recognize our need to each other and our responsibilities to one another.

Secondly, we must learn that to fulfill that responsibility, we must do it through the supply of God's Spirit. I can't just live like I want because it is going to affect my family, my church, and my friends. I have to realize that the only way to accomplish the potential God has for me is by the means of His Spirit. I have to be filled with His Spirit. I have to surrender to His Spirit. The Spirit is the supply that enables me to be what God wants me to be.

Look again at Ephesians 4:16.

"From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies."

I want you to look at that other phrase, "by that which every joint supplies." In the margin of the New American Standard Bible there is an alternate translation:

"Through every joint of the supply."

There are two things on Paul's mind. If you are not careful you will read it as if every joint, which represents believers, is the supply. Oh no. There are two things Paul has in mind. One is the joint, the believer, and its role. Two is the supply that the believer has to surrender to. You see, the joint is not the supply, and the supply is not the joint in the body. There are two things.

The word for joint (or ligament in some translations) is the Greek word *haphē*. It means a touch, and therefore can mean contact. So the joint is that which has contact with. Now, every joint, every believer, has contact with God by the means of His Spirit. But they also have contact with one another by the means of the Spirit either directly or indirectly because the Holy Spirit is the ligament that holds the joints together. There is a contact here. We see an interaction here. We are contacted with Him by the ligament, but we are also contacted with one another. So the first thing then is the joint. As I will share with you in a minute, that has a significant meaning.

Secondly, he has in mind the supply. Whereas the joint is in contact with the Spirit and in contact with one another, look at the supply. The supply is that which Christ the head gives to each joint by the means of the Spirit for growth. In other words, I have everything I need for growth in the person of the Spirit of God. Christ will give me, through the Spirit, everything I need to fulfill my potential and grow. So there are two things in mind. There is the joint and the supply. That joint has to be tied in to that supply. Implied in Scripture here is that daily I have to be surrendered to the Spirit of God. There is no way I can grow up like I should unless I am surrendered to the Spirit of God because He is the means of divine supply.

Now, the ligaments hold it all together. The head sends the message to the ligaments. Then the ligaments, controlling the bones, cause the whole joint to function. Now let me ask you a question. What would happen if you sprained a ligament? What happens if you break or fracture one of the bones? Immediately the whole process is shut down. Every single bone has to be doing exactly what its function is or the whole process is shut down. You may only have one little bone in your wrist out of whack. That one little bone not functioning correctly destroys the usage of the whole joint of the wrist. Once the ligament is sprained, once the ligament is torn, once any of the bones are broken or fractured you have just shut down the process.

What I see implied and what Paul is bringing out here is the necessity for every one of us to be about the things God has given us to do in the power of God's Spirit receiving the messages through the Spirit from the head. If anything happens to sprain that contact, to fracture the usage of that bone, then all of a sudden we have rendered the whole process obsolete.

I have always wondered where the local church fits into the whole body of believers. You know there were local churches, Philippi and Ephesus. How did they fit? Well, since the joint has many bones in it and in order to function correctly, all of them have to be functioning properly, maybe there is a subtle thought here that every local church has to be functioning like a church ought to function. If it doesn't, then it has rendered the whole body useless as far as its maturing and its growing into the stature of the fullness of Christ.

If that is the case, and I don't know if it is or not, what a challenge to us. We need to be a church that is in contact with the Spirit of God, that is listening to the messages from the head which is Christ. We need to daily be filled with the Spirit of God, as Ephesians 5:18 says. As we are controlled by the Spirit of God and as we are functioning in our gifts so that every single person is doing what God designed them to do, the whole body will grow up into what God wants it to be.

Well, verse 16 goes on to say:

"according to the proper working of each individual part."

Paul is showing you the measure by which each individual part participates "according to." In other words, it is going to be according to someone being submitted to the Spirit of God, filled with the Spirit of God, working out of his gifts which is God's divine supply to minister to the body. It is going to be according to the energy of the Spirit within me that I am willing to release and tap into. It is going to be according to each one of you, as you are willing to let the Spirit of God control you, according to that measure that you are willing to go to, the extreme that you are willing to go to, that the whole body of Christ worldwide will grow up and mature into the stature of the fullness of Christ.

One of the thoughts that hit me as I was studying this was

"from everyone who has been given much shall much be required." (Luke 12:48)

It is not a matter of contending with one another. It is a matter of just being what God wants each individual to be. When the body's joints are functioning properly, every joint contributing, then the body is being fitted and held together.

Let's go back to that phrase. What does it mean to be fitted and held together? The word "fitted" means perfectly fitted. My wife and I are weak in a lot of areas. Some people have strengths and some people have weaknesses, and they get married. Diana and I have strengths that are the same and we have weaknesses that are the same. That sometimes is sort of difficult. But we don't worry about it. Diana is gifted in areas, however, that I am not. Diana is gifted in the area of mercy. I have been accused of not having a merciful bone in my body, but Diana does. As she lets the Spirit of God work in her and I let the Spirit of God work in me, somehow God begins to put us and fit us together in a perfect way.

That is the same way it is in the body of Christ. We need gifts of mercy, gifts of serving, and all these gifts functioning in the power of the Spirit of God to enable the body to grow up to take on the character of Jesus and to reach the stature of the fullness of Christ. So each individual member, when he refuses to let the Spirit of God control him, shuts down the process and begins to immediately affect the whole, according to the proper working of each individual part. Once we realize our responsibility to each other, once we begin to realize that the only way to fulfill that responsibility is according to the supply of the Spirit, that we are a joint that is in touch with Him and in touch with one another then something is going to happen.

In the last part of verse 16 he says, when all this has taken place, it

"causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

The middle voice is used there for the building of the body. It means "of itself". In other words, we promote growth in a sense. If you want to see a church mature, the way to promote its maturity is for you yourself to grow up and mature in Christ. That is what he is saying. When each individual sees this, when each individual surrenders and bows before Christ, then he himself is promoting and causing the body to grow up in love.

What I am seeing in this Scripture is, instead of me trying to make my church members do what I am not doing, I need to go on and do it. That is the only way to encourage the body. I am literally promoting the maturity of the body by my own personal willingness to die to self and to let the Spirit of God give me the supply that comes from the head and go on and be what God wants me to be.

You know, the Christian life is called a walk, but it is also called a race. In a track meet when you have four people running the mile, nobody cares how all four of them did. They care how each individual did. It is an individual sport. In Hebrews 12:1 it says to

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

I can't run your race. You can't run my race. The way you encourage me to run my race is by you running your own. As each of us take that responsibility to grow up and mature in Christ, we become an encouragement to others to do the same thing. What a tremendous truth! The body will promote its own growth if each individual will tap into the supply of the Spirit and just let the Spirit of God minister through their lives.

I love the translation of verse 16 in the 20th Century New Testament:

"For from Him the whole body closely joined and knit together by the contact of every part with the source of its life, derives its power to grow in proportion to the vigor of each individual part and so is being built up in the Spirit of love."

There it is right there. As I am willing to let the energy of the Spirit of God motivate me and cause me to be what God wants me to be, and as you do the same thing, we have promoted our own growth. The body will, of itself in the Lord, begin to grow and to mature. You don't do it by telling somebody else what they should do. You do it by doing what you are supposed to do. If each of us will take that as a challenge, it will be overwhelming what God can do in our midst.