

Ephesians: Series 2
Growing Up Into Christ
Part 3
“Growing Up into Christ, the Head”
Ephesians 4: 11-16
Pastor Charles Price

If you have your Bible I am going to read from Ephesians and Chapter 4. I am going to read from Verse 11 down to Verse 16.

And if you were here last week, you may say, “Well that was the passage we read then.” And that is true, not because I brought last week’s notes by mistake, but because we didn’t finish what we began to look at last week, and I want to go back to this passage again.

We have been looking into Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, a rich letter which covers so much important ground. And we’re talking today about an aspect of what grows a healthy church.

And Verse 11 comes in where Paul has written about the fact that Christ, now ascended, has given gifts to men. And Verse 11 says,

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

That’s what we looked at last week.

And then it says in Verse 14:

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Please keep your Bible open there. I want to look with you into these verses.

A rabbi was once asked why rabbis always answered a question by asking another question.

And the rabbi replied, “Why not?”

Well I asked five questions of this passage that we have read this morning, and we looked at three of them last week.

He begins in Verse 11,

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.”

That is, the risen Christ who gave these gifts of leadership. The question is why does He give these gifts?

And the answer is, Verse 12:

“...to prepare God’s people for works of service.”

And we took time to talk about the fact that he doesn’t say “to do the works of service” but to equip and prepare God’s people.

And the New Testament model of those in leadership – pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc. – is that they are like coaches of a sports team.

A coach is involved in giving direction, instruction, training, motivation, in order that the team is able to play the game.

And it is the church, the body of believers who are to be equipped for works of service.

The question then is why should we be involved in works of service? And the second part of Verse 12 says,

“...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

It is then when we engage in works of service that we become built up, that we arrive at unity in the faith, we become mature and we come to the fullness of Christ, says Paul.

I don’t believe that we will grow spiritually without being involved in service. I think that is what is clearly taught here.

Now I know there are people who, in all kinds of ways, feel they are unable to serve. They may be bed-ridden or have some other limitation, which prevents them.

But of course we can serve in many, many ways, including our intercession that is serious and definite, not just a casual prayer. And we can spend time serving and investing in other people's lives.

And if we lack any deliberate outlet, we are going to stagnate and we are not going to grow.

That is the message of these verses.

And we are built up in a way that calls us to come to unity in the faith, he says, in the knowledge of the Son of God and attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We talked about that last time, but I am coming back to two of those things again this morning.

The next question – and now we move into new territory that we didn't have time to talk about last week. The next question is why is it necessary that we are built up in this way?

And the answer is in Verse 14:

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

He says this brings to us spiritual stability where we are no longer tossed around by the waves of false teaching that are going to come against us. Nor are we blown around by the winds of false teaching because our stability, he says, in the earlier verse, comes from our unity in the faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God.

Now I want to talk about two things from these verses, two very important things, especially in our day and age (although it would be true in all days and all ages, but we are particularly aware of this in our own age).

I want to talk about the nature of false teaching from these verses, and then the source of false teaching.

First of all, the nature of false teaching: then, he says, when we are built up in unity of the faith, in the knowledge of the Son of God, then we will no longer be

tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.

There are two powerful physical metaphors that Paul uses here. He says false teaching comes at us like waves and it tosses us about. And it comes at us like a wind that blows us here and there and is often difficult to resist.

The New Testament warns us a lot about false teaching. And that of course was a first generation church where you would have thought that the true teaching was so exciting, so life-transforming, nobody has time to mess about with it and distort it. But they did.

And the New Testament talks about false Christ's; it talks about false prophets, false apostles, false brothers, false doctrines - all those are straight quotations from different verses.

Hebrews 13:9 warns – Chapter 13 Verse 9:

“Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching.”

Peter writes about the ignorant and unstable people who distort Scripture to their own destruction.

Paul, in 1 Timothy, writes about teachings that come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

And there are other verses, and here of course in Verse 14 he talks of “every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Throughout the history of the church it has had to contend with false teaching. It rears its ugly head in different forms at different times. But probably, I would suggest, rarely has faulty teaching and error been given so much exposure as it has today, due in part to the advances in media technology, which makes so much stuff available to us either through television, radio, through the internet.

And so much of it, although erroneous, is cloaked in biblical language, which becomes especially deceptive to those who love the Word of God and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I am not talking about the obvious heretics who deny the fundamentals of the faith, who deny the deity of Christ, who deny the virgin birth of Christ, who deny that the cross of Christ was a substitutionary death on our behalf, who deny the resurrection, who deny the return of Christ, who deny the judgement of God on sin, who deny the authority and inspiration of Scripture.

We recognize those errors a mile off. They are around us, but they are less likely to infiltrate to groups such as we are here this morning.

Much more dangerous and much more prevalent in our day is a kind of false teaching that is cloaked with half-truths. And we recognize the half, or the part that is true, but it is then distorted and becomes something, which is no longer true.

And classic example of this in the Bible days was in the book of Job where Job's friends, three friends, occupy 37 chapters of advice to Job, some of which sounds good, some of which sounds good.

At the end of it, God said, "what you have said is not good" because they threw in alongside the good stuff little bits of poison that distorted the truth and distorted the message.

We are on television; some of you are watching us on television right now. And you know, we have some strange bedfellows in Christian television, and I am not at all hesitant to say that.

You can turn on Christian television programs and hear biblical distortions of truth taught with confidence. And sadly, people are deceived, especially in the popular, materialistic doctrines that include prosperity and physical well-being, which are partially true in one sense but not the gospel, not the message. And there are various branches that go with all of that.

Time Magazine, in an article that is four years old now, cited a survey that found that 61% of American Christians believe that God wants them to be financially prosperous.

The author of the article, a man called David Van Biema, says, the more shocking finding from the study is that 31% of Christians think that if you give God money now, He will return it to you multiplied over later on.

Well you can hear that kind of nonsense almost every time you turn on Christian television. And David Van Biema writes,

"There have been some breaks on Christianity moving towards materialism but these breaks are gradually being released and we're seeing more and more people saying, 'Well, why wouldn't God want us to be rich in this lifetime?'"

Now I am not going to critique that particular teaching this morning; that is not my purpose. I am using it only as an example.

But the problem is, like all effective false teaching that gains currency and does deceive people and does toss them around and blow them around (to use the analogy Paul uses here) is it contains some truth that is mixed with untruth.

And because you recognize, well there's a verse here (and I'll say a few things in a moment about verses that back up these ideas), but because we see this verse or this sentence we then, rather than understanding in the bigger picture and bigger context, we take that as a defining statement.

But why are we blown around so easily? According to these verses there are two reasons. One: we do not know the faith.

And number two: we do not know Christ in the way in which we need to know Him.

You see, what he says in the verses we just read, he has given these gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith (that's one thing) and in the knowledge of the Son of God (secondly) and become mature (because those are ingredients in maturity). Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.

And so the antidote in Paul's statement here to being blown around by false teaching is number one, coming to unity in the faith, and number two (we'll look at in a few moments), coming to knowledge of the Son of God. And I will explain why I think that is there and why that is significant.

First of all then, the first antidote is that we come to unity in the faith. Now that phrase "the faith" is used in the New Testament of the body of Christian doctrine that constitutes the essentials that we need to know and believe and live by.

So Paul, in 1 Corinthians 16, writes that we should "stand firm in the faith; be men of courage."

2 Corinthians 13:5 says,

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith."

Philippians 1:27 speaks of "contending as one man for the faith of the gospel."

1 Peter 5:9:

"...standing firm in the faith..."

Now 30 times the phrase "the faith" is used in this way in the New Testament.

Faith of course means active trust in the Lord Jesus. That is, if you like, like a subjective faith when we put our trust in Him.

But “the faith” is the objective defined body of truth that is essential to the Christian message. It has to do with the nature of God and the nature of humanity and why it is that humanity and God are separated and the means whereby God and man are reconciled. Those are the essential issues that constitute “the faith.”

So who is God? What is He like? What does He do? Why does He do it? What are human beings like? What do they do? Why do they do it? Who is Jesus Christ? What did He do? Why did He do it? And what does He do? These are the essentials.

Now we deviate from this when we don’t start about any issue with the question, what does the Bible say; we start instead, often for good reason, with how can I understand the Bible to say – and then I have an idea that is a presupposition that I want to endorse from Scripture.

Usually this comes about – and I have had many discussions about this with different people at different times because we live in a world that operates outside of the truths of Christian doctrine.

And this sets up a huge barrier between us and the world that we want to reach. And so sometimes our barrier is an obstacle, it is sometimes even embarrassment to us. “How can I work my way around it?”

I will tell you probably the two biggest issues that we are faced with today. One is doctrinal; one is ethical.

The big doctrinal issue that we face today is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus Christ said, “I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. No man, no woman, no boy, no girl – no one comes to the Father except through Me.”

That is a completely exclusive statement that Jesus made about Himself. Now had He said, “I am a way, and a good way. I am a truth – a big part of it. Many come to the Father through Me,” that would have been perfectly acceptable.

But in saying, “I am the way, the truth, the life; no man comes to the Father except through Me”, He has closed the door to any other avenue.

Now that is extremely difficult for people, especially in our pluralistic world.

And anybody in this building this morning who is ever involved in talking about Jesus Christ and talking about the gospel to those who are outside of Christ will

come up against this issue: “Why is it that Christians are so arrogant? Because you say that Christianity alone is true.”

If we were able to agree with the Hindu parable that talks about a mountain with roads going up the mountain from different sides and every trail is different and passes through different terrain, but they all come to the summit of the same mountain, and that’s how we should understand spiritual truth – somebody is coming up that side and we’re coming up this side, but it’s all the same mountain, that would be a lot more palatable. But that is not what the New Testament teaches.

Or the idea of some people being blindfolded and brought to an elephant and asked what it was. And somebody hugs a leg and says, “Well I think it’s a tree.”

Somebody else gets the trunk and says, “Well it feels like a fireman’s hose.”

And somebody else gets the tail and says, “Well this feels like a rope.”

And so they have got different ideas of what this is. They take their blindfolds off and they see it’s an elephant. And the idea is that, you know, we have got a little bit of truth here – I’ve got the trunk, you’ve got the tail, somebody else has the leg, somebody else, you know, slapping the side and says it feels like a wall. But actually none of us have it all; it’s actually an elephant and one day we’ll know that, but it doesn’t matter if you’re on the tail or you’re on the trunk.

You know the idea? That is a very popular notion of course.

And the other area, of course, is an ethical area, primarily in the area of sexuality where the sexuality of our current culture is so alien from the teaching of the New Testament, by no means only so, but often especially so in the area of homosexual relationships.

And many of you will know too that when you engage in conversation that it is not very long when somebody says, “Well why are you Christians so homophobic?”

I talked to a lady just last week who works in the media, a wonderful Christian lady. She said, “You know, whenever I get into conversation about Christ, they always say to me, ‘What do you believe about homosexual practice?’”

She said, “I don’t want to talk about that. It’s not the issue for me, but they won’t let me get around it.” She said to me, “Is there any way that we can say that’s okay and move on to the real things?”

Well I understand exactly the dilemma that lady has, and many of you have been in that issue. Of course it’s not the defining thing of the gospel and we won’t

understand the ethics of the gospel, which derive from the character of God, until we understand the character of God.

And we won't understand the character of God until we know what the Bible says about Him. So that's a starting place.

But you know, what we try to do is say, "Well, in our culture there is this fixed issue so what we need to do is try and find our ways around it." And I have come across people who find amazing ways around issues in Scripture.

One of the most remarkable in this whole question of homosexual relationships was in Romans Chapter 1, I heard somebody on tape give this message where it says in Verse 26 – it talks about the wrath of God being on humankind for all kinds of things. But one of the things it says is that women and men exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones and became inflamed with lust for one another.

And this person who I heard speaking said, "I want you to notice he talks about exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones."

"Now" he said, "for somebody of gay orientation, homosexuality is a natural thing." And what he said Paul is saying here is that don't violate what is natural to you for what is unnatural.

So he took it to mean this: if you are homosexual orientation, don't try to become heterosexual because that is unnatural for you.

No wonder Paul said about his own ministry earlier,

"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." (2 Corinthians 4:2)

Because this is an attempt, maybe well motivated, but an attempt to take the Word of God, treat it like a piece of play dough or plasticine and re-shape it to fit what I regard as the norm, which is the cultural explanation, (which by the way, will change next generation anyway because these things do).

Do you know the worst kind of preaching? It's the kind of preaching that is backed up by Scripture. You say, "Did you say that is the worst kind?"

Yeah, I have heard people say about something or some preacher who was in error; they say, "But he backs it up with Scripture."

And I always say, "That's exactly the problem. Good preaching isn't backed up by Scripture; it comes out of Scripture."

That's why it is essential, if we are going to be safe, that when we meet like this, we don't just pick a topic here or a topic there or a subject here and find all kinds of verses about that subject. That's a dangerous way to handle the Word of God.

But we teach it systematically, we expound it in its context, we explain it in its context. That is the way to become safe.

You see the Bible is not just a book of texts or verses; it is a narrative that runs all the way through of which these texts and verses are a part. But take them out of their context and you can make them, in fact, as often has been said, "a text out of context becomes a pretext for something that means totally the opposite sometimes."

You know Shakespeare has some brilliant quotations, but he didn't write quotations; he wrote plays. And out of the plays you get these brilliant quotations you can pull out. But you understand them in the context of the play.

We understand Scripture always in its bigger context. That's why he says that you must reach unity in the faith. That is understanding of the faith, the doctrinal structures and truths that are here in the Word of God.

Because the best antidote to error is not learning about all the errors that exist; the best antidote to error is knowing the truth.

I had a friend in England who worked in a bank and he was involved in the fraud area of this particular bank. And he said, "They taught us to spot counterfeit notes and they didn't give us lots of counterfeit notes. They got us counting real notes. And so we would count them, hundreds at a time. They'd just say, 'Just count all these notes.'

"And maybe there would be 500 notes and you would be counting them and maybe the 478th note in the pile will be a fraud. And you get there – you'd be counting up and think oh, that feels different. You look at it; it looks the same as the real one. Put it on the side."

And he said, "We would be told anything we were suspicious of, bring it out." And he said, "Again and again we would find the counterfeit notes because we were so familiar with the true ones."

We don't need to waste our time finding out all the errors that are around; we need to know what the truth is. And sometimes when you know the truth and you know this book and your heart and your mind is in this book, and you hear something that is not true, you may at first not be able to explain exactly why it isn't true. You just know something doesn't ring true.

And notice that Paul says in Verse 13,

“Until we all reach unity in the faith.”

Notice the corporate nature here.

“We all reach unity in the faith.”

We don't stand alone. Now this is important. Peter explained in 2 Peter 1:20 that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.

Beware of private interpretation. Beware of one or two over here who have begun to interpret something different, get a few people around them, but it is out of sync with the mainstream of Christian history and belief.

You see we enjoy this book and we enjoy learning quickly some of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

But this book was not recognized in its 66-book entirety that we know today until the 4th Century. Not because they chose what should go in, but they wanted to recognize and there were certain criteria by which they recognized the Scriptures that had the mark of the Holy Spirit's inspiration about them, and the apostolic authorship and so on.

There were a number of criteria. They didn't sit down over a weekend and decide what the Bible is going to be. No, they toyed with things. They looked hard and long at some books more than others.

And it wasn't until the 4th Century that the Bible, as we know it, came together.

Not only that; it was about then that the major doctrines of the Christian faith were recognized. And they came about through all kinds of debate and errors. It took centuries to come to some clear understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ who was both divine and human – very God and very man, is part of the way in which it was worded in the Nicene Creed.

This took centuries but they battled it through. Every alternative understanding, every erroneous understanding has come along before this – nothing new under the sun – been debated and corrected.

Some of the great creeds and the great confessions were the result of people examining the Word of God together to understand what is it really saying and listening to all the possible ways in which people might interpret it, but trying to understand the way it is consistent with the rest of the Scriptures.

We live at a very blessed time – that work has been done for us. It doesn't mean we don't think it through for ourselves; of course we do. But as a basic rule of

thumb, you can say this: if something is new – let me put it this way – if something is true, it won't be new and if it's new, it won't be true.

Paul uses this picture of the winds that blow - the winds of false teaching and the waves. You know when a tree is caught up in a wind, what keeps it stable is its roots go deep. Now I know that takes time.

I talked to a lady after the first service who has just come out of something which she thought was good and it proved itself to be erroneous. She said, "But I am a bit confused now as to what is the truth."

And I said, "Well the answer I am going to give you is it is going to take you awhile to know that. You don't just get that overnight. That's why we must spend time in the Word of God, that's why we must spend time not only listening to its exposition but also studying it and reading it for ourselves."

Truth of course can get lost. It can become covered over. It can become distorted and become twisted. But truth remains true. And eventually the truth will resurface.

And there have been times in history, like the Reformation, where the problem that precipitated the Reformation was the authority of Scripture had become replaced by the authority of the church.

And therefore, once the authority of Scripture has been undermined, you have to interpret it in the light of what the church teaches, and the church became corrupted because power corrupts.

And so the Reformation was a time when they rediscovered certain key things. They talked about the five "solas" in Latin. Sola – the only. Sola Christus – Christ alone. Scripture alone. Faith alone. By grace alone. To God be Glory alone.

That was the five solas of the Reformation, rediscovering not something new but something, which had got over covered and lost but it resurfaced, as truth always will, because truth remains truth.

We don't have to invent doctrine. We live at the end of twenty centuries of Bible study and thought and debate and discussion. And we must connect our roots with those roots that go deep, that when these winds blow, we are secure and stable.

When Billy Graham had a crusade in New York City many years ago now – it went on for several months – he was asked at a press conference at the end of that crusade whether he was aware that church leaders were saying that his style of evangelism had put the church back by 50 years.

And Billy Graham apparently said, “Well, if we have put the church back by 50 years, I am afraid we have failed. Our goal was to put the church back by 2,000 years, take it back to its roots.”

And that’s why the exposition of Scripture must lie at the foundation of the ministry of any local church, not just here on Sunday morning but all the activities in which we engage.

When we meet in small groups this is the basis of our thought and our discussion and our understanding.

You know 1 Timothy 3:15 talks about the church in this way. It speaks of it as

“God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

Elsewhere Paul says that Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone of the church. He speaks of the church being built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets – that is, their teaching. (We mentioned that last week.)

Here it speaks of the church itself being the foundation of the truth. That is, where the truth has not only been given, but embodied in the true church. (And there is always the non-true church that builds around it of course.) We are talking about those who are in Christ.

It can be very easy to develop some quirky ideas about doctrine on our own or with a select group of friends. And that’s why being part of a body is important. “Until we all reach unity in the faith” is how Paul puts it there in Verse 13.

That as a part of a larger body of those believers, we examine our doctrines together and against history and against, of course, the Scripture from where they come.

And it’s the church’s corporate responsibility to teach true doctrine and to censor and correct false doctrine.

So the first antidote to error, to being blown around by these waves and winds is unity in the faith. And the second that Paul talks about is knowledge of the Son of God because back in Verse 13, he has said there,

“...until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.”

And then Verse 14:

“Then we will not longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.”

It is the knowledge of the Son of God. Let me explain what we must understand by this. Christ is not simply the teacher of truth. He is the embodiment of truth. “I am the truth.”

That is quite different to saying, “I preach the truth.” I can say to you this morning that it is my sincere desire to preach the truth. But I am not the truth.

So what did Jesus mean, “I am the truth”? He means this: that everything that derives from the truth He preaches, and the truth His Word reveals to us, is embodied in Christ Himself.

So what is the goal of the Christian life? To be Christ-like.

I talked to somebody again about many conversations like this, but one particular conversation where somebody had been to a Christian meeting where there were unusual activities going on as far as they were concerned.

People were falling around all over the floor. Others were making all kinds of strange animal noises and there were all kinds of funny things going on, this person was saying. And they said to me, “How do I know if this is the Spirit of God or not? How do I know if this is true or not?”

I said, “Is what you witnessed true of Jesus Christ? Is it what Jesus Christ did? Did he fall all over the floor? Did He, you know, roar like a lion or anything like that?”

The answer is no.

Well then this is not truth. It may be harmless, it may just be people fooling around; it may be totally harmless – it doesn’t have to be evil. But it’s not truth, because the embodiment of truth, and therefore the measurement of truth, is Jesus Christ Himself.

And if something is not true, don’t emulate it or copy it or be part of it. Just leave it and it will pass, and it does.

But truth doesn’t pass. And this is important because sometimes we get confused with new waves and new winds. Is what is being demonstrated or taught – is it true of Jesus Christ and does it make me more like Jesus Christ? Because every manifestation of the Holy Spirit will contribute to Christ-likeness.

So how do we know if something is true? The two criteria, the two antidotes that Paul gives to us in these verses: is it consistent with biblical doctrine, is it

something that we arrive at together in the unity of the faith (and I don't just mean a particular denomination because you can have your own quirky stuff there) in the big picture of the church of Jesus Christ at large?

And is it consistent with Jesus Christ? Is it consistent with His nature and character and goodness and kindness and love?

But the second thing Paul implies here is the source of false teaching. He says in Verse 14 – middle of Verse 14:

“...by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Now he is getting very direct. Notice the words he uses here. He talks about them as being cunning and crafty and deceitful and scheming.

Let's be clear about this: this is not done in good conscience. There are ulterior motives in this false teaching. They are crafty, they are cunning, they are scheming, they are deceitful, they are manipulative.

And the most sinister of these and the most evil of these are those who are trying to get your money, and that's the object.

I talked to a lady here one morning and if she is here this morning I trust she will forgive me mentioning this though nobody else will know who it is.

And she had been listening to some preacher who she had written to and he had sent her a letter that was personally her name on it with a prophecy that this man had for her in particular.

But it involved her sending a moderate, a modest amount of money – I don't know, \$59.00 or something. Which she did, and another letter which asked for more. And this began to grow until this man told her he had a word from God that she would become a millionaire, but to do that, she must sow a seed. And the seed was the sale of her house, and the money sent to this ministry.

What surprised me was she was a fairly reasonable lady, but sucked in. And we have had correspondence with people who watch Living Truth who have gotten caught up into this and some have lost a lot of money.

Listen, let me say this: the followers may be deceived; that's true. We may genuinely have been hoodwinked. But the leaders, according to Paul, are not. The leaders are not acting in good faith; they are cunning, crafty, deceitful and scheming.

They are manipulating the Word of God and they are manipulating people for personal gain and personal following. And be very careful of sympathizing with them when they get found out.

I heard somebody say many years ago – and I thought it was very helpful – he said, “When it comes to failure within the church, deal with moral failure in people gently; deal with doctrinal error severely.” And I understand the wisdom of that.

So Paul is unambiguous that the source of this false teaching is not that somebody got a big confused; it is manipulative and crafty and cunning and deceitful. And earlier, he had said – Peter had written, rather, in 2 Peter 3:16 about the

“ignorant and unstable people who distort...Scriptures to their own destruction.”

And that’s why Paul says, “We have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use deception, we do not distort the Word of God.”

Here’s the last question very quickly (we won’t have time to talk about it properly) because in answer to the question why, why do we need to mature and grow and not be blown around by these waves of false teaching? He says instead (Verse 15),

“Instead...”

(That is of being infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching)

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all ways grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

I am going to say three things without much comment at all because time has gone. Firstly, the church of Jesus Christ grows up into Christ, its Head. That which is true always moves us closer to Christ and into more Christ-likeness and more Christ-like dependence, which is what it means for Him to be the Head.

That’s why this passage is Christ-centered, as all Paul’s writing is. We grow in the knowledge of the Son of God. We arrive at the stature of the fullness of Christ. We grow up into Him who is the Head, that is Christ.

The second thing – and this is absolutely vital too. Not only that, but it builds itself up in love, he says in Verse 15 and Verse 16.

Verse 15, he says,

“Instead, speaking the truth in love...

And Verse 16:

“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

All of this will operate in a spirit of love. We don't divide between those who agree with us and those who don't. Our ministry to the world is a ministry of love. This is talking about the church building itself up in love, but in order then, as an expression of love, the church ministers to the world.

That's why we totally refute the idea that we are homophobic. We love and minister to those in all conditions of life. And there has been strong ministry here to people caught in homosexual relationships and we love those people and minister to them.

It is in love, and I would like to say a lot more about that.

Whenever the Bible speaks about spiritual gifts in the New Testament in the various sections - you look - it always does so in the context of love. That is the gifts which are the means by which the church builds it up and grows and develops, are expressed and carried out in love. Loving people, and loving God and loving one another.

And the third thing is he says that each supporting ligament of the body does its part.

“The whole body” (Verse 16), “joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up.”

That is every member of the church of Jesus Christ, pictured here as a ligament, works together in unison.

Paul talks much more fully about this in 1 Corinthians 12 when he says the ear can't say to the eye, “I don't need you”. Actually he says it the other way around, the eye can't say to the ear, “I don't need you.” The hand can't say to the foot, “I don't need you.”

In fact, says Paul, every part of the body and the more unrepresentable parts, he says, are to be treated with greater honor because every part of the body needs every other part to function properly.

And if these are the five steps to a healthy, fruitful church – and I defined last week that fruitful and successful don't have the same meaning – it's fruitful church.

We need to recognize that if Christ gives gifts to the church, leadership gifts, for the purpose of teaching and equipping and coaching the people to engage in works of service.

And when they do, they are built up and they reach unity in the faith (it's not just a cerebral exercise; this is in acts of service together), they reach unity in the knowledge of Christ, the Son of God.

And then, he says, you are no longer blown around by every wind and every wave that comes against you and by the cunning, crafty and deceitful teachers who distort the Word of God.

No, instead we grow up into Christ with each part of the body supporting each other and operating in love as we minister fruitfully to the world around us. And that's why we need to be the church – that is the church that we need to be, should I say.

And we need to be this kind of church. Again, an e-mail this week said to me, "I am a Christian but I have difficulty knowing why I need to be at church every week and be involved so much, because I know Christ and I love people."

Because we are not just individuals; we are being built together. We need to come to unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God - and all this in the context of serving together.

You are going to just wither out and dry up. I said, "This may seem okay for you today. You can skip a Sunday and it's fine. You skip two and you feel fine. But you start skipping more and you'll discover five years, ten years from now, you will be out there, disinterested, detached, and you won't be fruitful."

Is that the church you want to be part of? That's the New Testament church and involves every single one of us who belongs to Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful this morning Your Word doesn't leave us muddling our way through with just a little bit of light here, a little bit of light there, but really confused.

No, we do know that the secret things – and there are many – belong to God, but the things which are revealed belong to us. And those things which are revealed to us are things on which we can be sure, about which we can be sure, on which we can build securely. We can sink our roots deeply into them and know that

when the winds come we are secure and safe. And when the waves will toss us about, we have an anchor for the soul that is sure and certain.

And I pray that we as a body, as well as individuals who make up this body, will be rooted and grounded in Your Word and rooted and grounded in love, that we may love this world for whom Christ died with understanding and clarity of message. For we pray it in Jesus' Name, Amen.