

Growing Up
Ephesians 4:14-15
October 17 in Kit (PVC 10/24)

We exist to increase the health and size of God's church, everywhere. In order for us to fulfill that purpose, we need to be able to define what it means to be healthy and understand how we can achieve that health. We will be talking about what it takes to be a healthy church during this fall series.

Being the Church, we are Christ's body. Bodies need certain things to be healthy. The human body needs food. If the food is healthy food, eaten at the right times and in the right amounts, it nourishes and strengthens the body. We, collectively, are the body of Christ. The food that keeps His body healthy is not made in a kitchen. The food that keeps His body healthy is truth.

Psalm 51:6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, there must be attention to proper teaching and growth in understanding the teachings of Bible. That's why here at Harvest we dedicate a healthy portion of time to the preaching of the Word. We believe that we as a church are nourished and made healthy by studying His word together. Throughout history, churches that are most healthy are those who give the most attention to teaching the people the Word. Today's text will show us the direct link between growing in sound teaching and growing healthy as the body of Christ.

TEXT

Ephesians 4:13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, * **14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,** 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

*We are cutting into the middle of Paul's flow of thought here. The point of verse 13 is that we as a church, as a group, mature together. We are to go from immaturity to maturity; from acting like children to acting like men and women. The end result we are seeking after is to make the body grow and build itself up in love. This is the second time in two sentences that Paul has pointed out that the goal of what we are doing is to build up the body of Christ. We as a people must love the church. We as a people must love the local church. This is the work of God assigned to us. Build up the church.

Now, in order to do that, let's look at the heart of our passage for today. The heart of our passage is the middle two verses, 14 and 15. Let's take a closer look at those:

14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

To be a spiritual child is to not be able to discern between doctrines. When I was new to being a Christian, I loved going to the Christian bookstore. Behind the cover of every book were new things for me to learn about my new faith. I just knew if I had the time to read them all, I would find treasure after treasure. So I would buy books and read them and soak up every word. But then, something odd started to happen. I'd read something in a book and it would be different from what I was learning from the pastor in my church. How could this be? Sometimes I read something that I had learned from other Christians was just plain wrong. And sometimes I'd read something that didn't make sense with what I had learned in the Bible myself. I was perplexed! Every book in the book store was written by a good Christian, so each one must be right, right?

By the way, it is not an insult to be a spiritual child when you are new to Jesus. But you are not to remain that way.

WE MUST LEARN TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHINGS.

How are we do to that? There are several steps to learning to recognize false teachings.

By learning truth

Learning the truth from the Scripture is the main defense against false teachings. This learning must be diligent and it must be humble. In other words, we must never choose to hold to those teachings that we prefer because we like them, nor hold to teachings that fit with a system of theology we have learned. Instead, we should always see God as a teacher who shows us new things and corrects things that aren't right. But be sure of this, "God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud." You cannot gain more insight into truth unless you humble yourself. That means you make yourself willing to daily take the low place at the feet of Jesus and say, "Teach me, Lord."

By avoiding the "celebrity syndrome"

We live in a celebrity culture and many teachers and preachers in the Christian world can attain celebrity status. Often, we can so enjoy listening to someone speak that we believe that what they say is true and we will defend them no matter what. When I was a new Christian I remember Tony Campolo speaking at several events I attended. I loved him. He made me laugh. He helped me understand the gospel. I bought tapes of the messages I heard and listened to them over and over till I could practically recite them from memory. Imagine my confusion then, when I was attending an event sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ and was told that Campolo was not welcome to speak at this particular event because Campus Crusade has a doctrinal issue with him. I thought, "Man, what's wrong with them? Campolo is the man!" I knew there must be some misunderstanding because Campus Crusade was a good group and Campolo was a great

preacher. Surely they can work this out.

Years later, when I was in seminary, Campolo was preaching in a church near by so I was excited to go with my friend and here him. We were both big Campolo fans. As we listened to him, we were both stunned as he articulated some ideas that both recognized as dangerously close to outright heresy (saying that spirit of Christ is in every person, even the lost, in a mystical way). I was stunned.

Later, as the pastor of an American Baptist Church in New Jersey, Campolo, being an American Baptist, was very much an important man in that denomination. Imagine my surprise when I saw that he and his wife were speaking at a gathering of the Rainbow Baptists (which is an organization of gay Baptists that are seeking to have all American Baptist Churches affirm the legitimacy of gay relationships). He didn't say he agreed with them but he did say that he didn't judge their position as his wife, also an American Baptist pastor, agreed with them whole heartedly.

You see, the leaders of Campus Crusade for Christ had seen something in his theology that was divergent from Christian teaching. I don't know what it was. But clearly, they were right. Campolo had set himself on a path that was veering away from the word of God. These people who were more mature than I was (and more mature than most of us who attended the conference) made the decision to protect us from him instead of promoting him. Looking back, I'm glad they did. At that time, I was very vulnerable to every teaching that came down the pike. ***When we make celebrities of pastors and teachers we make ourselves vulnerable.***

Now when I walk into the Christian bookstore, I can see with different eyes. I realize that I am free to read it all, but not all of it is treasure. Much of it is simply marketing to make a profit. Much of it is published with an eye to what appeals to me and my culture. What do the people want to hear? What is hot these days? What will people buy? The reason this should give us great caution is that the Bible says:

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

Make no mistake, this dynamic is alive and well in Christian publishing, Christian preaching, and Christian television. People are resistant often to give up on a teacher that blessed them greatly. I understand this. I was very blessed by God through the teaching ministry of Tony Campolo. However, I must remember that it was the gospel that blessed me through this gifted man. And that man himself is responsible, as a teacher of God's word, to remain doctrinally sound and accountable to the word of God. And when he strays, I must be willing to recognize it and point it out to others who might be influenced by him, lest they go astray; much as the leaders of Campus Crusade for Christ did for me.

I was talking with a friend recently and he was defending a man who I had declared heretical to the point of harm. He said to me, if you just saw him live and sat under his teaching,

you' d see his heart and know that he is a good guy.

My friend didn' t know it, but what he was telling me was that the good intentions of the man should influence me more than the words coming out of his mouth. This is a bad path to be on. Listen, we live in an existentialist age; truth is relative to the person and interpreter, instead of absolute. When we as Christians lose the ability to distinguish truths from the person speaking we are embracing the fallacy of our age. We have the example of Paul. Paul pointed out that certain teachers were to be trusted, like Apollos, and Timothy. But he didn' t mind pointing that publicly when the apostle Peter was wrong on his violation of an important doctrine. And he also took the time to warn the churches against certain individuals who were in the church who were teaching falsehood. Do you know who Alexander the Coppersmith is? Neither do I. But, he is in the Bible because Paul pointed him out by name to Timothy, telling him to keep an eye on him for he had opposed the teachings of Paul. We must have the courage to do the same when needed.

> By Respecting Christian History

You see, we must remember the words of Jude who said we must earnestly “*contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.*” This contending for the faith is not new and it will never be settled. In other words, many people think Christians should never oppose other Christian teachers, thinking it is divisive. But contending for the faith has gone on in every age. There was never a time when certain doctrines of the church were not being challenged from within the church. Today is not different. But if we know our Christian history, we will know which doctrines have been fought for and why they are important, so that when they come up again, we will recognize it.

Today, there are several important areas of doctrine being attacked from within the church. Let me name a few that I see all the time.

1. The nature of the atonement of Jesus.

That means that Bible-believing Christian pastors are challenging whether Jesus died as a substitute for our sins or just to show us the way to salvation. History shows us that we must not challenge the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Many don' t know their history so when Rob Bell and Brian McClaren, whose books are in the Christian bookstore, challenge the atonement, it goes unnoticed. Rob Bell has one of the largest churches in the country. Many churches use his nooma videos to learn spiritual truths. Is everything he teaches wrong? No. Can a Christian learn good things from him? Sure. But a person can also learn a heresy so dreadful it could damn one' s soul of a person who isn' t a Christian if truly embraced.

The entire gospel message centers on the idea that without the shedding of Jesus blood, as a sacrifice for our sins, as a substitute for us, we cannot be saved. If you teach people that this view of the atonement is wrong, then you lead them to conclude that Jesus' death was no more than a great example of sacrifice and nothing more. Then salvation no longer depends on faith in Jesus who took our sins, but it depends on our sacrifice of our own lives. This is just wrong. By the way, if you are here today wondering what you must do to get to heaven, here it is: believe in Jesus who died for your sins, bearing your punishment on the cross!

2. The Existence of the Local Church

There is a wholesale assault right now on the local church. I was in the Christian bookstore just walking around, and found at least 3 books, that challenged the institution of the local church. The internet is rife with people challenging the legitimacy of the local church. That's why I keep our bookstore stocked with titles that teach about the church and what it is. You might think, well, what does this matter because we teach the truth here. It matters because in our information age, the people of our church are exposed to these teachings and need answers.

3. Gender roles in the Church and Society

Everything from the Bible's teachings on roles of men and women in church and in the home to homosexual legitimacy is being challenged by Bible believing pastors.

4. The existence of hell

5. The necessity for believing in Jesus to be saved

There are several more, but these are common. Satan is attacking the church at these points and she must be defended. There are other ways of recognizing false teachers, but I want to conclude sticking close to our text.

CONCLUSION

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ

As a Christian community, we must speak the truth in love to one another. Now, I am doing that now (hopefully!) from the pulpit. But this command is more encompassing. We are to mature, grow up, together. There is a community aspect to growing in good teaching. We must talk to one another about what we are learning in the Bible. We should share insights and questions with one another. It is in this way that iron will sharpen iron and we will grow up soundly.

We should share good books. Share what we learn in our times in the Bible. And we should especially share in community groups. Community group is a place where you can discuss questions about the Bible from the sermon and related issues. We must speak to one another in love, but we can't do that if we are not putting ourselves in a community where loving friendships are possible. After our community group last week, I was asked a question about the word "saint" in the Bible and what it means. By being asked, I was able to look back at the Bible, and learn from the discussion, as I hope the other person did also. In community group we have had discussions about the nature of grace and how it works. In the group questions come up about how to work out what we are learning, and in these questions and discussions come opportunities for us all to grow together. And that is what this text says we are to do.

By the way, if you'd like to be a part of a community group, they run in 10 week terms

and you don't have to be at the ones at the beginning to jump in. You can find more info on the website, and I urge you to join in and speed up the maturing process in community.