

EPHESIANS WEEK #7 – SJGC

“Building Up the Body”

Ephesians 4:1-16

PATTI

We’re in the book of Ephesians, and one of the advantages of looking at a longer passage like this is to see the big picture and to understand the logical flow of what Paul is saying.

In this passage, Paul makes three points.

1. Even though **we have the life of the Trinity** in us,
2. **we live in spiritual immaturity** until we’re
3. willing to do the hard work of creating **unity in the church.**

1. The life of the Trinity

In chapter 2 Paul told us that a Christian is a person who, through the riches of mercy, has been

“raised with Christ and seated us in the heavenly places.”

Here in v. 15 Paul says more. He says that as a believer,

Christ is your Head and you’re the body.

The head and the body share the same circulation system, the same nervous system, THE SAME LIFE!

In v. 4-6 Paul tells us what connects believers together is that we share the **same Spirit**, the **same Lord (Jesus Christ)**, the **same God and Father** of all.

What makes you a Christian is not just you’re a nice person or a moral person or you believe the Bible, though that’s all true.

What makes you a Christian is that **you have the life of the Trinity in you.**

Christianity is NOT primarily a way of living that's about being **good** and **nice** and **kind** and **caring for the poor** and **being a person of integrity**.

JEFF

Of course, being a Christian INVOLVES all that (so please don't stop doing these things)... but that's not the ESSENCE of it.

We insult both the Gospel and ourselves when we think of Christianity *mainly* as being *nice people*. Jesus didn't die to make you **nice**. He died to make you **NEW**.

You're **new** and you're **alive**, because you have the power and presence of God in you.

You're raised up, seated in the heavenly places.

That's point #1.

But even though we have the life of the Triune God in us...

2. We live in SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

This is point #2 in the middle part of the passage.

We won't go into all the details now about spiritual gifts in v. 7-10, not only because it would take us 3-4 sessions to do it justice, but because this was covered in small group meetings not so long ago.

But the idea is that God gives every Christian a spiritual gift or gifts. These are abilities to minister to one another.

And v.11 tells us **the staff and leaders in a church are equippers**.
Pastors and teachers and evangelists are people
whose gift is to **equip** the rest of the church
for **works of service** or **ministry**.

But **what is the PURPOSE of all this ministry**
that's happening at St. John's and in other congregations?

PATTI

Paul says in v. 12-13 that **it's all to equip his people for works of service**
(v. 12)

so the body of Christ may be built up, until we become ... what? mature.
(v. 13)

Until we reach MATURITY...

Until we become like Jesus in the way we
think, feel, and act.

In v. 14 Paul says, **"Then we will no longer be infants ..."**

In other words, **we are spiritual babies**,
and the reason we need to be
part of the church is because,
otherwise, we **stay infants**.

Babies are great, but every parent knows you don't want a
10 year old baby – or a 40 year old baby.

This is why we need the ministry of the church.
All the things that are happening at St. John's...
(the things that get announced in the newsletter and bulletin)

are happening **so that we may no longer be children.**"

As an apostle, Paul even includes himself in this.
He, too, is spiritually immature,
and falls short of being like Christ.

And if Paul is able to say, **"We infants,"**
then what about the rest of us?
How old are you and I, spiritually speaking?

At baptism, we were born again
by water and the Word of God.
Whether you can remember it or not,
you became a spiritual baby then,
with the life of the Trinity in you.

But even when you began to embrace
the faith and grow in the faith that was
imparted to you at baptism,

that's really akin to a baby rolling over
or taking her first steps.

You're still a toddler.

Infants are as alive as they ever will be.
But to stay an infant is wrong.
Why?

JEFF

Paul says that spiritual infants are

“blown here and there by every wind of teaching ...”

A. Spiritual babies are not discerning.

Real babies can't distinguish between

good food, bad food, and poison.

It doesn't matter. “Just give it to me.”

Paul says that's how spiritual babies are too.

When it comes to doctrine, they can't tell good teaching from bad teaching from poisonous teaching.

So unless you know your way around the Bible,
unless you're theologically savvy,
you're a spiritual infant.

B. Spiritual babies are incredibly self-centered.

This is why Paul says in v. 2,

**“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient,
bearing with one another in love.”**

Real babies are completely self-centered.

They want what they want NOW.

When they get a little older, you have to teach them,

“Share your toys”.

You have to train them to respect
the needs and desires of others.

Spiritual babies are the same way.

If you're always getting your feelings hurt.

Always feeling slighted.

If you're always conscious of,

*“How are people looking at me or thinking about me or treating me?
If you’re absorbed with yourself, you’re not thinking of others.*

If you can’t take criticism or admit when you’re wrong,
If you’re always concerned about your image or how you look,
these are signs of spiritual immaturity.

PATTI

C. And spiritual babies are not steady.

They’re back and forth. Paul says,

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth ...” (v. 14)

Babies have a short attention span.

The only way you can get them to sort of pay attention
for 10 seconds is if the object **is lights, sparks, music, or action.**

But then they’re on to something else.

They **laugh** and then they’re **suddenly upset** and then they’re **bored.**

Spiritually, that looks like inconsistency.

If you come to worship and you get really convicted
that you should change something about your life,
but you don’t follow through, that’s a sign of immaturity.

Obeying God shouldn’t depend on your circumstances or feelings.

You just do it because you’re steady, because you’re enduring and patient.
But if you can’t do that, you’re a spiritual baby.

In Luke 10 when Jesus sends out his disciples
and gives them power to cast out demons and heal people,

the 12 come back all excited and exclaim
 like little kids, **“It worked!”**
“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!
We can knock out demons.”

But Jesus kind of pushes back on this, and says,
“... don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you,
but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Translation? **“Grow up.”**

“Don’t get all excited that today God is answering your prayers
 and you’re seeing great things. Rejoice that God has given you eternal life.”

Rejoice that your sins are forgiven...

that your names are written in heaven.

What God has ALREADY done for you should be
 a source of infinite joy,

whether he does anything else good for you or not.

You should always be happy because of that.

Don’t say to God, **“What have you done for me lately?”**

Spiritual babies do that.

JEFF

Put positively, those who are spiritually mature

1) know their Bibles. You’re theologically wise and discerning.

2) You’re not self-centered, but serving others.

You’re quick to admit when you’re wrong.

You’re not self-conscious, or always getting your feelings hurt.

3) If you’re mature, you’re steady, not up and down.

When you make a decision, you follow through.

You know how to handle suffering.
You know how to continue to be faithful and obedient
even in difficult circumstances.

Paul says even he does not have all that.
He's not as mature as he ought to be.

So what are we supposed to do about all this?

1) Don't be shocked at the immaturity of other believers.

Some Christians get offended by immature people in the church, and
as a result jump from one congregation to another,
looking for one where they will never be offended.
But there is not such congregation.

If even Paul is a spiritual baby, then
every congregation will be filled, at least figuratively,
with poopy diapers.

And at some level, we can't worry about that,
because Lutherans, of all people, understand that
we are not saved by being mature;
We are saved BY GRACE.

So be very unsurprised when you see immaturity in other people,
but don't ever put up with immaturity in yourself.

If there are things in your life that haven't changed -
bad attitudes, bad habits, or character flaws,
and you say, **"Well, that's just the way I am,"**
you are essentially denying the life of God in you...
The power of God.

Whatever may be wrong with you is no match for that!
So don't give in to it.

PATTI

Being a Christian is like riding a bicycle.
You're either moving forward, or you're falling off.
So every once in a while, ask yourself...

1) **Am I** humbler, happier, more self-controlled -
do I have more inner peace than I did last year at this time?

2) Dare I **ask somebody who knows me**
whether this is the case or not?

You may not like the answer, but it could be a
starting point to say, "I don't want to be a baby anymore."

3) **Do the hard work of creating unity in the church**

It won't happen by just working on yourself as an individual.
Only through deep involvement in a church community
will you experience the kind of close relationships
that will lead to growth.

Paul defines maturity in v. 13. He says, "... until we all reach ..." What?
"**... unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and
become mature ...**"

We become mature by becoming one in
faith and knowledge of Jesus.

The biblical God is a community of
3 persons inside 1 being,

and in that community there's
 perfect love,
 perfect communication,
 perfect harmony,

So if you want to become like God,
 it only happens when the life of the Trinity
 is reflected in community.

That means you can't just drop in on church
 once in a while and expect to grow.

You also can't be on the outs with people.

Or ignore people. Or talk about people.

JEFF

V. 15, ¹⁵ **Instead, Paul says, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."**

That's it. There's the practice. You and I will not grow
 unless we're plunged into a community of people
 who **balance truth and love** in their speech.

Speaking the truth in love means absolute honesty
 saturated with the gentleness and goodwill of love.
 Without this perfect balance of truth and love together,
we die spiritually. What do I mean by that?

Love without truth is deadly.

When you say, "I love people, but I don't want to tell them the truth

because I don't want to hurt them..." that's deadly.
 We can't know ourselves unless somebody from the outside tells us.
 I remember the first time I heard myself on a recording like this,
 and I remember asking my family,
 "What was wrong with me? Did I have a sore throat?
 Why does my voice sound so high and tinny and whiny?"
 Everybody said, "**That's how you always sound.**"

I hear myself right now through the bones in my neck.
 I DON'T hear myself the way I really am.
 Nobody can see or hear themselves except through
 the vantage point of an outside set of eyes or ears.

So if you have people who love you
 but refuse to tell you the truth,
 you can't have self-knowledge.
 You won't grow.
 You will not become the person
 God created you to be.

PATTI

**Love without truth is deadly,
 but truth without love is equally deadly.**

When you tell someone the truth, but you're ABRASIVE,
 if you are COLD and UNLOVING, that other person
 will **refuse to listen**. They're going to **harden their heart**.
 And you'll actually drive them further from the truth.

Unless we are plunged into a community filled with people
speaking truth and love together,

not only will we not grow spiritually,
but we will begin to **wither and die**.

JEFF

Some of us are nice people who tend to
err on the side of love without truth temperamentally (Jeff).
And some people are direct, and tend to tell the truth
without love temperamentally (Patti).
Our selfishness and sin often keep us from balancing the two.

Why do those of us who tend to be more loving fail to tell the truth?
Because we're AFRAID the person will be mad at us and hurt us,
or will be crushed, and then we'll feel guilty.

The reason we are not telling the truth is
PRIDE and SELF-CENTEREDNESS.

PATTI

What about those of us who tell the truth well but we're not very loving?
We tell the truth, but we want to show them who's right.
We tell the truth, but we like winning arguments.
We tell the truth, but we have motivations that are basically selfish.

You see why this is a dilemma.

We can't spiritually grow or live without truth and love,
and we're not capable of giving it to each other.

What's the solution?

The Gospel is that Jesus went to the cross for us.
He died for us because of the truth that we are sinners.
And unless someone paid for that sin, we'd be lost eternally.
But on the other hand, Jesus went to the cross because he loved us.

When Jesus Christ went to the cross,
it was the most insulting thing anyone has ever said to you.

“You’re so messed up and sinful, so lost and condemned that you can’t save yourself.”

But when Jesus went to the cross, he was also saying,

“I love you so much. You are a person of such worth and value that I’m willing to die for you.”

Unless you know you’re that loved, you won’t accept the fact that you’re lost.

And until you know you’re that lost, you won’t understand the magnitude of his love.

The gospel is the ultimate message of truth and love.

If you understand it, it humbles you out of ever telling the truth abrasively,
and it affirms you out of your need to always please people.

That’s maturity.

It’s what Jesus desires for us.

To that end, he places us in Christian community,
where there’s lots of ministry going on,
and plenty of opportunities to practice balancing these ways of speaking and hearing each other.

So that we may no longer be infants,
but grow to maturity in Christ.

PRAYER:

Father, we're so grateful for your life within us. And yet that life only turns us into babies. Form us more and more into a community that speaks truth in love to each other, so that we may become more and more like your selfless Son Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.