

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Infancy Versus Maturity

by Dan Trygg

“And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds-and-teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for work of service, unto the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the experiential-recognition of the Son of God, to a mature person, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ in order that we might no longer be children (infants, toddlers, immature), tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but truthing in love, we might grow up all things into Him who is the head, Christ, ¹⁶ out-from whom *the whole body*, being closely-fitted-together and knitted-together by every connection (touch) of the supply (provision, support, help), according to the proper inworking of each individual part, *causes the growth of the body unto the building up of itself in love.*”
Ephesians 4:11-16

This is another one of the long sentences which Paul used in this letter to convey deep interrelated truths. In 1:3-14, he had blessed God, who had given us every spiritual blessing in Christ, and then went on to describe a number of them: ...having determined before the foundation of the world that the ones in Christ would be set-apart and blameless, adopted as sons (full-heirs), and be to the praise of His glory, ...having been redeemed by His lavish grace, poured out upon us richly through the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, ...making known to us the hidden mystery of His will, that all things would be summed up in Christ, in whom we were called according to the inworking of God’s purpose, ...hearing the good-news message, and believing, we were sealed by the Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance, until the time of our full redemption, ...all to the praise of His glory. Then, in 1:15-23, Paul appealed to us, his readers, saying that he was praying that God might give us the ability to see and perceive what is the hope He has called us to, what is the abundance of the glory of our allotted portion in Christ, and what is the above-and-beyond greatness of the power He has made available to us in Him, ...which is comparable to the power that raised Jesus from the dead, and established Him in glory at the Father’s right hand, ...arranging everything under His feet, and giving Him as the Source and Completer of all things to us, the church. In 3:14-19, we have another prayer of Paul, asking God to establish, prepare and strengthen us to come to experientially-know the love of Christ that is far greater than our ability to comprehend, ...in order that we might be filled-up unto the fullness of God.

God has removed every barrier, and brought all of us (no matter what background, or past life choices) to become one family in Him, ...even giving us life, when we were spiritually dead, and liberating us from the domination of the devil, ...all by His grace, making us new and preparing us for good works which He Himself will bring into our lives to do (2:1-22). Since God has done all of this, we are to live worthily of our calling, jealously discovering, guarding and expressing our oneness together in Him, by treating one another with grace, patience and acceptance, so that the unity of the Spirit might be made visible in our interactions with one another (4:1-6). Last time, we saw that Jesus gave spiritual gifts to His people. These are special workings of His grace within our lives. He gave certain gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers) to instruct, prepare and encourage all of us who are set-apart in Christ to do the work of serving one another to build up the body of Christ. The goal is to help us grow in our understanding of our faith, our perception and recognition of Jesus at work in our lives, so that we all might grow up to be like Him in our character and to be filled with His fullness. These are the hallmarks of spiritual maturity: a clear grasp of spiritual truth, a personal awareness of Jesus at work in and through your life, and becoming like Him in your thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, so that the indwelling fullness of His nature is made visible in and through your life.

There are several other NT passages that contrast the difference between immaturity and spiritual maturity. The Greek word means “infants, babes, toddlers”. It refers to people who are ignorant, unskilled, inexperienced, childish, impulsive, people who lack discernment or forethought. In 1 Corinthians 3:1, Paul makes the contrast between people who are spiritual, versus those who are “fleshly, as infants in Christ”. Immature people live according to the promptings and impulses of their “flesh”, whether that is their actual physical desires and comforts, or it refers to their self-understanding, natural-emotions or self-ability. People who are “spiritual” are led and prompted by the Spirit, and rely on the Spirit to guide and empower them to do His will. Spiritual people have discernment that others do not have, because of the work of the Spirit in their lives (2:12-15). In 1 Corinthians 13:11, the apostle described how when he was a child (“infant” – same word in Greek), he spoke as a child, thought as a child, and reasoned as a child. Part of the process of “growing up”, or becoming mature, requires that a person set aside, or quit relying on immature thinking and behavior. In Hebrews 5:11-14, the author admonished the people he was writing to, because they should have become mature, since they had been Christians for some time. Sadly, they remained immature, because they had not applied themselves to grow and develop their ability to discern good from evil. The

underlying problem, according to this passage, is that they were “inexperienced in the word of righteousness”. **Such immature people depend upon others to feed them “predigested food” or “spiritual milk”.** The people who become mature are those who have trained their faculties of perception through study and practice to be able to discern what is good from what is evil or unhealthy. In summation, **spiritual maturity does not just happen. It must be developed through learning God’s word, applying it in life situations, and deepening a dependence upon the Holy Spirit to receive insight and discernment from Him.**

In Ephesians 4:13, **the goal of our interactions with one another is to help each one of us to become mature.** Again, **this involves an understanding of the faith, a recognition or discernment of Jesus in and around us, and the development of His character in our lives.** We should come to think and behave like Him. **This is what our spiritual gifts are for. We are to interact in ways that will help one another heal, grow, and become like Jesus.**

Notice what Paul says next: **Then we will no longer be like children.** If we do *not* grow to become mature, we will remain immature. If we do not become spiritually-focused and learn to be led by Him, we will remain fleshly in our orientation, thinking, emotions and behavior. **Immaturity is the default. The only way to escape immaturity is to “grow up”**, which requires investing time and attention to learning the word of God, paying attention for indications of God at work in our lives, and developing a mind that is set on the Spirit. **Then we will no longer be wave-tossed and blown about by every wind of teaching.** If our lives are not established solidly in our relationship with God, the ups and downs or life will dramatically affect us. We will be “carried away” by them. If we are not solidly trained in the word of God and the heart of the Spirit, we will be vulnerable to the deceit and trickery of false teachers. Actually, Paul’s language here is a little more direct. Our English translations tend to describe escaping immaturity as the *result* of our becoming mature, ...and it is, ...BUT, **the way that Paul described it in his writing is that we are to help one another become mature in order that we might no longer be immature.** He used a “purpose clause”, ...“in order that”. In other words, we are to invest in our own growth, and the growth of each other, *in order to* free one another from the limitations, vulnerabilities and bondages that come with immaturity. **Maturity and freedom are not just the result of growth, it is the purpose of growth, ...the reason why...,** we invest to help each other grow. **Paul created a community of believers who worked hard to help one another become all that they could become in Christ, in order to escape the weakness, vulnerabilities and frustration of living a life that is not filled with God.**

What did that look like? There are two very distinct aspects to this. First, **“But, truthing in love, we might grow all things into Him, who is the head (source, completer), Christ...”**. Notice that the translation does not say “speaking the truth”, ...because there is no “speaking” in the original language. Obviously, “speaking truth” is probably the most common way of thinking about this, ...but **we can express or communicate truth in more ways than simply by spoken words.** For example, we can communicate that we value or love someone by saying those words, or by a touch on their hand, a hug, or an act of hospitality or service. **Different people may have various ways that they would choose to communicate this reality**, based upon their spiritual gift, their personality and temperament, and maybe even based upon their life experiences. **The point is that God desires that our expressions to one another help each of us to grow all aspects of our beings toward Christ.** This could be in stretching *ourselves* to follow the leading of the Spirit to authentically express the inner reality of what He is prompting or revealing within us, ...or about someone else. **Sometimes, the focus of the “truthing in love” may be to grow us into Jesus in a deeper way. At other times, the focus of the “truth” God wants to communicate may be to primarily benefit someone else, and grow him or her to a deeper level of trust in Christ.** NOTE: We are to grow all things into Christ, who is the Source and Completer. The word “head” in NT Greek does *not* mean “boss” or “authority”. It means HE is the initiator, builder and completer in our lives, and in the life of the local body of Christians. If we can help one another look to HIM for leading, provision, encouragement and direction, we will find ourselves being led by the Spirit in a way that benefits us all, and that will bring His purposes into tangible expression in our midst.

Second, **“out from Him the whole body, being fitted-together and knitted-together by means of every touch of provision, according to the inworking in measure of each part causes the growth of the body unto the building-up of itself in love.”** Just as we grow all things *into Him* as the Source and Completer in verse 15, so in verse 16 the prompting and empowerment come *out from Him*. **The whole body of believers are seen as the change agents, ...the ones who are doing the work. Each one has a significant role to play.** Just as our body parts are joined together by connecting tissues that bring nutrients and life to each cell, in a similar way we are fitted-together and knitted-together by a “touch, joint, or connection” of supply, provision, or help. **As we receive life from the Holy Spirit, and we express truth to one another in love, the vitality of His life spreads throughout, and the whole body builds up the body in love.**

It is quite clear from this image of the body of Christ, that the “word gifts” are not “in charge”, or even the “primary movers” in what God is doing. They just help us to discover our place in Christ, and our significant role in building up one another. **Together, we become healthy, Jesus-prompted, Spirit-empowered, ...and growth happens!**