

Ephesians 4:14 "Stand Firm In The Truth"

EPH 4:14-16 "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. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 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."

This morning we come to a portion of scripture which has a variety of contrasts to it: Being infants as opposed to being mature. Tossed around by the waves as opposed to being held together. Deception versus speaking the truth. Cunning and crafty people serving themselves versus loving people and serving others.

And this portion of scripture comes on the heels of Paul's explanation of how the Lord gives gifts to the body of Christ with the express purpose of building up the body 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.

What we see here is that Jesus Christ places a very high priority on our growth and maturity in the Lord. He has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers and every other gift enabling us each to contribute to helping each other grow up in Christ.

If we're not growing and moving forward with the Lord then we begin to atrophy, like those muscles which are never used, they begin to deteriorate and shrivel up. No one can just stand still in their relationship with Christ. There is no holding pattern in the status quo. If you're not moving forward you are going backwards.

Knowing this, our Lord Jesus has taken every measure to ensure that we move forward with Him. He has given us His Spirit to strengthen and encourage us. He has given us His word to feed us with truth. He has given us people who are gifted to instruct and encourage us in our faith. He has given us the body of Christ where we might do all of these things in the context of worship and fellowship to accomplish this important task of growing up in our

faith as we become conformed into the image of our Lord and Savior.

In fact, as we look to the rest of this letter we see that this is Paul's intention. Growing up in our faith as we become mature in the Lord we will find ourselves being used by God in a way where it becomes necessary to be a faithful witness as we no longer walk as the world but as imitators of Christ as we see in chapter 4 and 5.

And then as we come to chapter 6 we see that we will be in a position to be servants of God who will need to put on the full armor of God because of the spiritual battles we all face as we begin to grow and serve Christ.

But as we come to our text Paul makes it abundantly clear that if we are to be faithful soldiers and ambassadors of our Lord we must have the proper attitude and goal of becoming mature in our faith. And essentially that means that we have a sober outlook on life in Christ. It means that we look at the world and our lives through the eyes of Christ instead of looking to our own ambitions and agendas.

It's being mature enough to lay aside self-interests, which is characteristic of children, and look to the goal of faithfully representing our Most High God according to His desire and will and then submitting to His will gladly because we love Him, knowing that He first loved us.

This is where Paul is going. And so we'll start with EPH 4:14 "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."

Jesus Christ is really concerned, as the Spirit of God conveys that concern to Paul, that we be prepared for all of the waves and the wind which would try to throw us about and confuse us in our walk with Christ to the degree that we become ineffectual in our walk.

You see, Satan knows that he can't take our salvation away from us. But, what if he can keep us hamstrung so that we are so concerned with false doctrines that will not allow us to grow whereby we become useless in our service for Christ?

Every child of God who has placed his or her faith in Christ starts off the same way; as a babe in Christ. It doesn't matter how old you are or what experiences you've had in life. We all start at the same

position, born-again to a living hope. And now the race begins, as Paul puts it, to pursue a life in Christ as we look to our prize, who is the living Savior.

But, when we come into the kingdom of God through faith in Christ, the object is not to stay a babe in the sense that we remain immature in our faith. And yet there is a sense in which we must always be babes. Jesus talks about this.

MAT 18:3-4 "And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

What Jesus is saying is that just as a child will trust his parents with his very life we must have the kind of trust in Christ that places our eternal lives in His hands. We must never think that we are above God as though we knew better or had a more effectual way of attaining a relationship with our heavenly Father. Those who think that they have a better way are those who will find that at the end of the road they will be lost forever.

There is only one way and that's through the One who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me."

And so being a child, in the sense of trusting our heavenly Father, who has provided our way back to Him through Christ, is the kind of trust that doesn't need to look to the left or the right but can stay on the course set before us as we place our faith in the Son of God who loved us so much that He died for the penalty of our sins.

But this is not a one-time event. Even as seasoned soldiers of Christ who have known the Lord for years, we must still be like that child who trusts our Lord and stays close to His side by faith everyday of our lives until we see Him face to face and we stand before Him clothed in the blood of Christ.

And so, in this sense we must be children. But we must also be children in another sense. And Paul points this out in 1CO 14:20 "Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults."

An infant is certainly one who has been born with a sin nature. But an infant is not one who has the capability to sin as an adult. We who are older and further along in our lives have a much greater

capability to not only be creative in our sinning but much more prone to pursue temptations an infant could never imagine.

Paul says, when it comes to evil be like that infant whose only concern is to look to his mom and dad who is there for his comfort and protection and nourishment. But to be infants in that sense we must be adults in our thinking. And so, in an odd sort of way, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are called to grow up in our faith, and yet as we do we become more and more like that little child who constantly looks to and trusts in our heavenly Father, no matter what.

Paul puts it another way in ROM 16:19 "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil."

The innocence of a child is an unfamiliarity with the evils of the world. It has not delved into the far recesses of the cesspool of sin that the more "worldly" have tapped into. I'm always amazed at the T.V. and movie industry when they rate their programs.

Somehow, taking the English language and reducing it to four letter gutter-words is deemed for mature audiences. Fornication and immorality are labeled, "adult content" as though this is what every adult partakes in and somehow it's mature and sophisticated.

Paul tells the believer that being mature in Christ will make you innocent as children when it comes to the sin in the world. But Paul also realizes that even believers need to grow into this child-like approach as they leave behind the worldliness of sin. This was the problem in the church at Corinth.

1CO 3:1-3 "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly -mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?"

Paul equates worldliness with being mere infants in Christ. But, what's interesting about this growth process of leaving worldliness behind is the truth that doctrine or teaching contributes to becoming mature and spiritual in Christ. Paul says in our text in verse 14 that "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."

You see, all teaching affects your life. Bad teaching, or bad doctrine will affect our lives adversely. On the other hand, good biblical teaching or good doctrine will enhance our walk with Christ as it instructs us in a way that promotes godliness and truth concerning who we are and what Christ has done for us, and is continuing to do for us.

It's amazing how much of the scriptures warn the church about false teachers and false teachings. In an attempt to protect the sheep the apostles warned constantly to be fed on the pure milk of the word so that by the word we would grow and mature in our salvation. It grieved Paul to know that wolves would come in to ravage the flock with false teachings.

He wrote in ACT 20:29-32 "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Do you remember who this exhortation was addressed to? It was addressed to the elders of the church in Ephesus, the church whose letter we're now studying. Here's what Paul told those elders.

ACT 20:28 "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

And so it shouldn't surprise us that in this letter to the Ephesians Paul would once again remind these people that the acceptance of false teaching will cause us to be just like the winds and the waves where we're up and down and without any foundation upon which we can firmly place our feet, causing us to remain as babes in Christ.

In Paul's day some of the main false doctrines which were creating havoc in the Christian world had more to do with Jewish and Greek thought. The Jews were trying to introduce the law back into the salvation equation. This was upsetting entire churches, not the least of which was the church at Galatia.

GAL 1:6-9 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a

different gospel - 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

But the Jewish traditions and teachings were not the only false doctrines being introduced at that time in church history. The Greek doctrines of Gnosticism was also being introduced. Gnosticism was a teaching which saw the distinctions between good and evil and concluded that knowledge alone would solve the struggle between the two.

And so there were elite groups who supposedly gained hidden and mystical knowledge which only the mature and spiritual could utilize. This infiltrated the church in a way where this hidden knowledge was added to the revealed word of God and became an additional means of sanctification creating a sort of special group of Christians.

It introduced many mystical approaches to the Christian life which on the surface may have seemed spiritual but in fact misplaced the emphasis on formulas and other-worldly things which enabled the "enlightened" to overcome evil in the world. Some have suggested that angel worship may have come into vogue in the light of many false teachers who adhered to both Jewish and Greek thought.

In fact, Paul addresses this in COL 2:18-23 "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. 20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

False teaching will take you on a roller-coaster ride like the waves of the sea, but it will never enable us to mature in our faith because the wisdom this false human teaching is based on is worldly and sensual. And by sensual I mean that which promotes the senses and experiences as a basis for our walk.

And yet, what has Solomon told us? There is nothing new under the sun. These teachings we see in the first and second centuries of the church were nothing new then and today they have reared their ugly heads once again as they promote spirituality in the guise of the sensual and special knowledge.

This is why so many in the church today are flocking to all sorts of "new" and strangely mystical experiences which are supposedly helping people mature and appreciate their faith in Christ. We live in a world where the path of least resistance is sought. 'If my Christian walk seems hard then I will choose a path which will give me the quick fix and the instant sanctification.'

'If I can just be delivered from the demon of lust or the demon of tobacco then I can begin growing in my faith. If I can just be prayed for by the right person then I'll travel to his meeting and find comfort and answers', as though God is limited to any geographic location.

There are so many false notions and false teachings in the church today, it would make your head swim to see how they all have affected the body of Christ at large world-wide. For me to warn you of every blatant false teaching, even aside from the less blatant ones, would take a life time.

This is why I believe God is raising up men and women who devote their lives to investigating these false teachings and teachers who have access to our homes via the electronic media. Ministries like CRI, the Christian Research Institute, The Watchman Expositor, Herescope, and a host of others who expose and teach what these false teachers believe and how they adversely affect the church and then warn believers to not get involved with their unbiblical teachings.

I have not been called to that ministry, though I certainly keep up with what these ministries expose. My job is to equip you with the truth from God's word so that you can recognize the false teachings for what they are.

But, since we don't practice our faith in a vacuum, but in the real world, I suppose it would fit this study to give you an example of a blatant aberration in the Christian community which has led to many being tossed here and there.

One which has taken this country by storm, pun intended, is the Holy Laughter movement which gained notoriety in Toronto with the Vineyard church in that city. This was back in 1994. Since then this supposed movement of the Holy Spirit has been transported to every corner of this country and has found its way across the sea to Europe.

The main characteristic of this movement are the different manifestations which take the form of uncontrollable laughter, sometimes for hours on end; making strange noises like barking and howling, together with groaning and grunting. Other manifestations are doing what is referred to as carpet time where people are glued to the floor for hours on end in a trance like state.

Then you often have people running around and doing bizarre things like flapping their arms as though they are eagles, jumping over pews, climbing on top of tables. Others have been found in a fetal position, claiming later God was taking them back through a childhood experience.

There have been a variety of testimonies where women were on the floor with legs spread apart as they were supposedly giving birth to new revelations from God and people coaching them and actually going through the motions of delivering this (baby) new revelation.

All of these experiences and more are part of the attitude that God is doing something new in these last days. And yet what is conspicuously missing in all of these encounters is the teaching of the word of God for the building up of the saints. There is nothing new and improved if it doesn't meet with the word of God.

The objective authoritative word of God is unfortunately being replaced by the subjective experience, or "touch from God" which these people claim. I believe these people have been touched, but it's not from God.

These people are "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."

The leaders in this movement will often encourage people to come forward in these meetings, but when they come down front they are not encouraging these Christians to pray but rather to 'leave your self open to let the Holy Spirit do a fresh work in your life.' They are actually discouraged from praying.

I've got literally piles of information at home on this movement. But, what it all comes down to is seeking God in an unbiblical way. Yes, they will pull scriptures out of context to promote this stuff, but the whole counsel of God's word reveals this for what it really is. Fleshly at best, deceptive at worst as they promote doctrines of demons.

If you think that is an overstatement let me quote the man who is instrumental for bringing this movement to this country. His name is Rodney Howard-Brown. This quote is taken from a work called the "Coming Revival" put out in 1991.

"I'd rather be in a church where the devil and the flesh are manifesting than in a church where nothing is happening because people are too afraid to manifest anything And if a devil manifests, don't worry about that either. Rejoice, because at least something is happening!"

My question is who will discern if it's something of God or devilish? And how will we know unless we have a standard by which we measure all experiences? And who will stand up and say this is not of God and it's destructive to the body of Christ?

Ironically, Benny Hinn, who is experience driven and not widely known for his discernment of spiritual things concerning the written word of God, has recently come out and has condemned this movement as being of the devil.

Is it of the devil? I would say that to the degree that people are being deceived into thinking that an experience rather than the discipline to study the word of God, to become mature in the faith, it is a tool of the enemy to keep the eyes closed. But, I rather believe that in many cases it is what Paul refers to in our text. The "cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."

Believe me, the Toronto Blessing as it's sometimes referred to, and now recently the Brownsville Blessing, are not the only concerns we should have today. There are many false teachings with many adverse effects that we should be aware of, at least to the degree if

we run across them we would have the discernment to recognize them as false.

But to most of us this movement is a blatant deception. Not so blatant deceptions can be just as devastating to our walk with Christ. Things like the movement ECT, Evangelicals and Catholics together, where there is an attitude of ecumenicalism, where the love of Christ is the supposed common denominator and both groups can rally behind this love as they overlook each other's differences.

But love without truth is no love at all. Other movements like "Purpose Driven" with Rick Warren has attracted churches all over the world to form an alliance to promote what he believes is a common purpose to attract the unbeliever into the church through relationships with a more user friendly approach to church.

In and of itself there is nothing wrong with an approach that is more in tune to the culture of our day. But taking the cultural temperature around us and making that the determining factor as to how we reach people with the truth of God's word and His gospel is a dangerous place to be in.

And the fruit of "Purpose Driven" is seen where the truth of God's word takes a back seat to Pragmatism as a way of getting more people into the "church." This is why Rick Warren can call on "Evangelicals" to join with the Roman Catholic Pope to work together in a missional way, not in a structural unity, whatever that means.

Warren would contend that it would involve focusing on the sanctity of life, the sanctity of sex, and the sanctity of marriage. But this only opens the door to a union that ultimately blurs the distinction between what is biblical and what is not as this union down-plays the distinction between Rome and the word of God.

Ultimately, the only way we can detect that which is false is if we have the truth of God's word embedded in our hearts and minds. And that truth must be placed there as we discipline ourselves to be Bereans and check the word out and study to show ourselves approved. This is what Paul told Timothy as he alerted Timothy to the names of those who were promoting false teaching.

2TI 2:15-18 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 16 Avoid godless chatter,

because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. 17 Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some."

We are no longer to be children Paul says, and therefore, we must all grow up in our faith so that we do not give the devil an opportunity to deceive which in turn creates an environment where we will be tossed here and there always looking to the next new revelation or the next experience.

There's nothing wrong with experience, but if it's out of accord with God's word that experience must be discarded in favor of a solid truth we can stand on and grow in.

Peter gave a warning in 2PE 3:17-18 "... dear friends, ... be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

If we understand our position with Christ and His desire for us to become mature in our faith, so that we can become effective servants in His Kingdom, then it stands to reason that we would grow according to the very word He gave us. As long as we keep our eyes on Him we will be less likely to have our eyes diverted to the things of this world.

COL 3:1-2 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."

Let me end with a prayer from Paul that he delivered to the church in Philippi in a letter. This is a prayer from the heart of God for all of us in every age.

PHI 1:9-11 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."