

**THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND**  
**THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:**  
**A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**  
**(LESSON FIFTY-SEVEN)**

**“AS EACH ONE DOES ITS PART”**

**EPHESIANS 4:11-16 (KING JAMES VERSION)**

*11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

*12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

*13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

*14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;*

*15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:*

*16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

In previous lessons, we stated that in verses 11-13 of Ephesians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul, calls our attention to the first evidence of spiritual growth and maturity — **Christlikeness**. The **New English Translation** renders the verses in the following way:

*11 And he himself gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

*12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ,*

*13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God — a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature.*

We also stated that in verse 14, Paul emphasizes the second evidence of spiritual growth and maturity which is **stability**. The **New English Translation** furnishes the following translation of the verse: “So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.”

In verse 15 Paul writes, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.” The **New English Translation** offers the following translation of the verse: “But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.”

In this verse, he speaks of the third evidence of spiritual growth and maturity — **speaking and practicing the truth in love**. Here, he contrasts “speaking the truth in love,” with the speech motivated by “the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.”

The words “speaking the truth,” are the translation of the Greek word **alétheuó: (al-ayth-yoo’-o)**, which literally means, “truthing.” It implies **being** true as well as **speaking** the truth and **following** the truth.

In the context of this verse, it means to speak the truth of Scripture into a person's life. The idea includes Spirit-led confrontation where it is vital to tell the truth so that others can live in God's **reality** rather than in their personal **illusion**.

The believers, living in and around Ephesus, had been exposed to the truth of the Gospel and had been saved as a result. Now, they were being exposed to the false doctrine of crafty men whose aim was to deceive them. The Lord had given them the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists and teaching pastors to secure them against false doctrine, and Paul is exhorting them to confess to each other the truth in which they had been instructed and to practice living in the truth. By so doing, they would grow to maturity in Christ.

Truth is the element in which we are to live, move, and have our being. But truth must be inseparably joined to love. Paul writes, "*But speaking the truth in love.*" The Greek word translated love is **agapé: (ag-ah'-pay)**, which refers to unconditional, sacrificial love. It was chosen by the writers of the New Testament as the distinctive word to be used when speaking of God as love, of the love which the Holy Spirit produces in the heart of the yielded believer, and the love with which God loves the world of unsaved humanity.

Love is the element in which truth is to be spoken or confessed. Paul literally says, "truthing in love!" He is urging believers to maintain truth in love, in both speech and life. Growth and maturity in the Body of Christ is maximized when we **speak** the truth in love and **live** or **practice** the truth in love.

The words, "*But speaking the truth in love*" are, in the present tense in the Greek, indicating that believers should endeavour to speak and practice the truth in love **continually**. This is only possible if we are being continually energized and enabled by the Holy Spirit! The words are in a construction in the Greek which indicates that speaking and practicing the truth in love is a choice of our will; it is something that we must consistently **choose** to do. **Philippians 2:12-13**, clearly indicates that God, through the ministry of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit, will give us both the desire and the energy to speak and practice the truth in love. **The Message** translates the verses as follows:

*12 What I'm getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience. Now that I'm separated from you, keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God.*

*13 That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure.*

One of the marks of a mature believer is the ability to speak and practice the truth in love. This may sound simple, but in reality it is not always easy to do. Some of us may be fairly good at speaking the truth, but not so good at speaking the truth "**in love.**" Others of us may be fairly loving, but we have difficulty in speaking the painful truth to our brothers and sisters. The Word of God instructs us to do both. We must speak the truth, but we must do so in a loving manner. A lot of trouble and heartache would be avoided in the church if we all followed this practice. In **Proverbs 27:6** we read, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*" When we have a problem with another believer, we should go directly to the person and speak the truth in love to them, instead of going to someone else and complaining to them.

It is critically important for us to understand that speaking and practicing the truth in love is integrally associated with growing in Christ-likeness. The words "*grow up,*" are the translation of a Greek word which means, "To grow or cause to grow or increase." We are to "*grow up into him in all things.*" Paul is telling us here that the growth and maturity of all Christians is to be directed toward the goal of becoming like Christ.

In other words, our growth is to be according to His example. Jesus Christ is the source from which we receive the grace and power to grow. He must also be the object and goal to which our growth, at every stage is directed.

Jesus Christ is our head. The word “*head*” is a translation of the Greek word **kephalé**: (**kef-al-ay**). Figuratively, as it is used in this verse, **kephalé** refers to Christ as the Head of the Church which is His mystical Body. Every believer is a member of that Body. The head is the part of the body that contains the brain. The brain rules and governs the human body.

Christ controls every part of His Body and He is the power that inspires, rules, guides, and sustains the Body. He is the mainspring of its activity, the center of its unity, and the seat of its life. Paul elaborates on this in verse **16**. He writes, “*From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As each one does its part, the body builds itself up in love.*”

The **New Living Translation**, furnishes the following translation: “*He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*”

Here, Paul uses the analogy of a human head and a human body to illustrate the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ to His Body, the Church, each believer being a member of that Body. Christ as the Head is the source of the growth and well-being of each member.

In his commentary on **Ephesians**, the British theologian **John Phillips**, made the following remarks, relative to verses **15** and **16**: “Paul returned to one of his favorite illustrations: the church is compared to a body, of which Christ is the head. In other passages, Paul developed the theme of the interdependence of the members of the body and our mutual suffering and joy. Here the theme is our mutual development. We are to grow up as individuals and as a body.

Nothing is more wonderful than the way a body grows. Light, warmth, nourishment, exercise, and protection contribute to the fascinating process of growth to maturity. Likewise, Christ gave various gifts to His church to stimulate growth... the process continues until maturity is reached.

Not all parts of a body grow at the same speed or to the same size. The measure of our individual growth is Christ. How much like Him have we become? To what extent is His glorious life being reproduced in us, the members of His body?

Paul was anxious that the church in Ephesus and all who would ultimately read this circular letter might grow spiritually... “Look at Christ,” Paul was saying. “Look at Him; live like Him; be like Him.”

The words “*From whom,*” at the beginning of verse **16**, refer, of course, to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. From Him, the entire body derives its capacity for growth. In verse **15**, Christ was identified as the **goal** but here, He is identified as the **source**. It is from Christ that the “*whole body*” is being fitted and held together. The word “*whole*” is a translation of the Greek word **pas**, which means “all without exception.” Paul clearly focuses on the growth of the body as a whole, rather than on individual believers. We must bear in mind that the context of the first **16** verses of chapter **4** is “**unity in diversity.**”

The words, *fitly joined together*, are the translation of a Greek word which means, “To join closely together; to unite or knit together; to frame together, to be fitted.” In construction terms, the word speaks of the entire elaborate process by which a structure is put together, including the careful joining of every component of the structure, each part is precisely cut to fit snugly, strongly, and beautifully with every other part. Nothing is out of place, nothing is defective, nothing is ill-shaped, and nothing is inappropriate.

The Greek word is in the present tense indicating that this process of being joined closely together, of being united or knit together, is an ongoing process. The word is in a construction in the Greek which indicates that this work of joining, uniting and fitting together, is occurring from an outside source, God. And yet, because we are “*lively stones*,” or “*living stones*,” according to **1 Peter 2:5**, each of us must be willing to allow the Master Architect to fit us into the building just as He desires. In order for the Body to be built up or properly constructed, each part must willingly submit to the hand of the Master!

The materials are accurately and carefully united and fitted together by Jesus Christ. Although different types of material are used, the Master Architect skilfully works one part into another part, so as to create a beautiful and enduring structure. There is a fitting and joining of the various parts to each other, forming a symmetrical, compact, well-ordered building. In the Church, the Body of Christ, the different materials of Jew and Gentile, male and female, black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, though they were previously separated from each other, and, in some cases, were even at enmity with each other, now become united, joined and fitted together to comprise one harmonious body!

Brothers and sisters, the Church has many members in one Body, and all the members do not have the same office. It is a co-operative body, each individual member of the Body contributes to the building up, or edifying of the Body in his or her own way, and with his or her gifts and talents. The Church is not a collection of loose stones; its members are in vital union with Christ their head, and in light of their being in vital union with their head, they should also be in vital union with each other!

The word “*compacted*,” is the translation of a Greek word which means “to cause to come together, bring together, join together into unit.” It means to bring together by ligaments or joints. This word is also a present participle in the Greek, speaking of an ongoing process. This process in which the members of the Body of Christ are being joined closely together and are growing together in a vital, organic union, is brought about “*by that which every joint supplieth*.” This phrase indicates that while the empowering for growth comes from the Head, **the members of the Body are also to be fully involved in the process.**

The word “*by*,” is the translation of the Greek word **dia**, which is the preposition of intermediate agency. The Greek here is “through the intermediate agency of every joint of supply.” The joints are in contact with the other parts of the body and serve as channels which extend nourishment from Christ, the Head. This divine energy joins the members closely together and causes them to grow into an organic union. How the joints are connected with the other members of Christ’s Body affects the whole Body of Christ. The supply joints are not only the channels through which the source of supply of life from the Head is brought to the various members; they are also the bonds that bind the members of the Body together.

The word “*supplies*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “supply, provision, equipment, or support.” It refers to lavish or generous giving or abundant supply or provision. The word never means to give or supply or provide in a stingy manner. This lavish supply is “*according to the effectual working in the measure of every part*.” The word “*every*,” is a translation of the Greek word, **Hekastos: (hek’-as-tos)**, which means, “each individual, every single one.” The idea is of each individual unit viewed distinctly, as opposed to severally, as a group.

More literally, the phrase “*according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,*” reads “according as each individual part works in its own proper measure.” This phrase highlights the contribution of each member to the life and development of the Body as a whole. The French theologian and reformer John Calvin, wrote, “If we want to be considered members of Christ, let no man be anything for himself, but let us all be whatever we are for the benefit of each other.”

Brothers and sisters, the life of Jesus Christ the Head, flows through the joints of supply, constantly connecting the individual members of the Body together and causing them to grow together. This process is controlled by the “*effectual working*” or the operative power which is exerted by the Head. The volume or strength of this operative energy is determined by the capacity of **each part** to allow this “*effectual working*” to operate in him or her. **In other words, the degree to which the life of the Head, operates within each joint and flows through each joint, connecting the members of the Body more closely together into a more compact organic union, is determined by each individual believer’s fellowship with the Lord and with his or her fellow believers!**

Brothers and sisters, we must ask ourselves a very relevant question. “What happens when **each individual** member of the Body of Christ does not function properly allowing this ‘*effectual working*’ to operate in him or her?” **Samuel Lewis Johnson, Jr.** gave the following answer: “When we don’t really operate within the body, the body becomes a paralyzed body.” He then added, “If I don’t teach with my same irritating way, constantly, the body loses something. Isn’t that amazing to think that the body loses something if I don’t function? The body loses something if you don’t function. The body does not function perfectly if there are members in the body who are not functioning. There is a measure of paralysis in the body. So may God help us to come to know what our gifts are, and may God help us to exercise them and to exercise them in love.”

When each individual member of the Body does his or her own special work, the other member grows and thus, the Body builds itself up in love. As with all living organisms, spiritual growth in the church does not come from forces outside but from the vital power within that causes the growth of the Body for the building up of itself. Clearly, the whole body is involved in this process of building, not simply those who are leaders or who have special ministries. All of this is in love, which is always to be the spirit of the fellowship of believers. Above all things, the Body is to manifest love, and when it is built up according to this plan, the world will know that it is the Body of Christ. Even when we are engaged in corporate worship, we should be concerned about the edification of all our brothers and sisters. In public worship each individual believer should be concerned with how he or she can spiritually benefit others.

In verse **16**, Paul speaks of the fourth evidence of spiritual growth and maturity. This is **cooperation**. Brothers and sisters, it is critically important for us to understand and appreciate that, as members of the one universal Body - the Church (big **C**), and as members of a local body - the church (little **c**), we belong to each other, we affect each other, and we need each other. Each believer, no matter how insignificant he or she may appear, has a ministry to other believers. The body grows as the individual members grow, and the individual member grow as they feed on the Word, provided by the ministry gifts, and minister to each other by speaking and practicing the truth in love.

Again, the emphasis is on love: “*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*” (**Ephesians 4:2**); “*speaking the truth in love*” (**Ephesians 4:15**); “*the edifying of itself in love*” (**Ephesians 4:16**). If it is only **in love** that the Body increases, then, it is only **in love** that true Christian ministry will contribute to the building of the body.

The Australian New Testament scholar **Peter Thomas O’Brien**, wrote the following: “The spiritually gifted community is not only distinguished by its full possession of gifts through which divine energy flows, but it is also marked by its divine nature. Love, thus, becomes the criterion for an assessment of the church’s true growth. Even the fullest demonstration of gifts has no spiritual value if love is lacking.”

**Warren Wiesrbe**, commenting on this verse, made the following remarks: “Love is the circulatory system of the body. It has been discovered that isolated, unloved babies do not grow properly and are especially susceptible to disease, while babies who are loved and handled, grow normally and are stronger. So, it is with the children of God. An isolated Christian cannot minister to others, nor can others minister to him, and it is impossible for the gifts to be ministered either way.”