

Ephesians 4:15—but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,

The opposite of remaining immature and walking in error (Ephesians 4:14) is to “*grow up*” through listening to “*truth*” spoken “*in love*” (Ephesians 4:15). “*Speaking*” (*aletheuo*) can be defined as: “to speak or maintain the truth, to act truly or sincerely.” Regardless of how a New Testament saint is gifted (pastor-teacher, service, exhortation, mercy—Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:7-8), he should function in his gifting by speaking (or maintaining) “*the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15)—a response requiring considerable maturity. No environment is more conducive to spiritual growth than one inundated with truth spoken with compassion and sensitivity. The quote, “Truth without love is brutality,” is absolutely correct. Speak truth without love and the listener fails to “*grow up in all aspects unto Him*” (Ephesians 4:15)—even had he previously desired to mature in the faith. Ill-advised instruction of this sort also disillusiones the lost who might otherwise consider Christ. We must not forget that “*the kindness of God leads...to repentance*” (Romans 2:4)—never His wrath.

“*Speaking the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15) doesn’t mean that we refrain from correcting or rebuking the disobedient. Scripture (truth) was given “*for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*” (2Timothy 3:16). Because truth brings conviction, it pricks the listener’s heart regardless of how lovingly it is expressed. Hence, to speak the truth in love is not to be equated with speaking only what pacifies the listener’s ear. A loving rebuke is many times used to great advantage.

When the corporate body of Christ has the maturity to speak (and maintain) the “*truth in love,*” the individual members of the body “*grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ*” (Ephesians 4:15). “*Into Him*” can also be translated “*unto Him.*” Because Jesus causes spiritual growth in all church saints (Ephesians 4:15-16), along with the Father and Spirit (Colossians 2:18-19; 2Corinthians 3:18), we must look to Him for grace and power as we choose His approach to life. How did He live while on earth? He lived by His Father’s life (John 6:57; 14:10). We must grow past attempting to imitate Jesus and begin to live by His indwelling presence. Only then will we “*grow up in all aspects into Him, who is head, even Christ*” (Ephesians 4:15). The byproduct is a life bearing the unmistakable “*fragrance of Christ*” (2Corinthians 2:14-16), a life of maturity.

Ephesians 4:16—from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:16 also deals with spiritual growth and the Lord’s use of New Testament believers to bring about this growth. My prayer is that we might understand the depths of this passage!

from whom the whole body, (4:16a)

Because Christ is the subject matter of the latter portion of verse 15, “*from whom*” (Ephesians 4:16) refers to Christ. As was determined earlier, Jesus generates spiritual growth within New Testament believers—as do the Father and Spirit. As each member of Christ’s body (the church) begins to live by the life of “*the head*” (Ephesians 4:15), the supernatural becomes the norm. In fact, “*the whole body*” (Ephesians 4:16a) matures due to Christ’s transforming power dwelling in each believer!

being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, (4:16b)

We have already seen that the spiritual growth within New Testament believers has its origin in the Godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit), Jesus being the head of the body. But Jesus uses His body as a means to bring

about this growth, the joints playing a vital role in the process (*“being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies”*—Ephesians 4:16b). As is the case with our physical bodies, the hand and the lower arm are connected by a joint. The hand is unlike the lower arm but needs a properly functioning lower arm to reach its potential. Similarly, the lower arm needs a properly functioning hand to reach its potential. But neither the hand nor the lower arm could reach its full potential if not for the joint that connects the hand and the arm—the joint being a point of contrast. Consequently, the body of Christ, just as the human body, consists of many body parts (1Corinthians 12:12-27) connected by *“joints”* (Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 2:19) and *“ligaments”* (Colossians 2:19). For the entire body to function according to design, each individual body part must reach its full potential.

“Being fitted” and *“held together”* are present passive participles, the present tense confirming that this process is occurring even now. The passive voice verifies that the spiritual growth within Christ’s body, both in its individual members as well as the body as a whole, results from Christ’s power (the passive voice indicating that the subject is being acted upon by an outside source). Jesus holds His body together *“by that which every joint supplies”* (Ephesians 4:16b). As with our physical bodies, the joints are points of contrast. Thus, in the body of Christ, the joint allows two believers, each possessing a unique spiritual gift, to connect. Therefore, the joint serves as a conduit through which the benefits of the individual spiritual gifts within Christ’s body pass from one believer to the other for the purpose of bringing the entire body to maturity.

according to the proper working of each individual part (4:16c)

Optimal spiritual growth occurs within the church when each member is properly exercising his unique spiritual gift. Consequently, we must press on to maturity so the Lord might use us to bring about optimal spiritual growth within other believers. Such growth can only transpire by our applying *“the principle of the cross”*—positively responding to others for their benefit rather than our own.

causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (4:16d)

“Love” (Ephesians 4:16d), the first *“fruit of the Spirit”* mentioned in Galatians 5:22, makes faith work in the life of a believer (Galatians 5:6). If Christ’s body is to grow and be built up, *“love”* will play a major role in the process.

For the spiritual gifts to properly function within Christ’s body, meaningful and intimate relationships must be developed among its members. But gifted individuals possess dissimilar personalities, sometimes generating conflict. So in walks *“love”*! *“Love”* allows the believer to enter into positive relationships for what others receive. Wasn’t this the principle demonstrated at Calvary? Should the body of Christ adopt this mindset as a lifestyle, believers would be strong, mature, grown up, and built up in love. All the big smiles and unhappy eyes would be transformed into big smiles and happy eyes—and maybe someone would want what we have in Christ. What motivation to press on to maturity, waving good-bye once and for all to self-centeredness, mediocrity, and compromise!