**CHRISTIAN UNITY DEMANDS GROWTH MATURITY**

***… until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and*** ***become mature,******attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

***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 people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead,*** ***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.******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***

 Ephesians 4:13-16 (NIV)

Paul has noted that Christ’s five-fold gift ministries to the church have both a function and a goal in mind; the function is ‘*to equip his people for works of service’* (4:12) and the goal: ‘*so that the body of Christ may be built up’* (4:12). The passage before us enlarges on that goal by describing it in three ways with the introductory ‘*until we all reach*,’ a term used nine times in Acts for travellers arriving at their destination.

The first way he describes the goal is as ‘*the unity of the faith’* (4:13). Where *‘the faith’* (4:5) is clearly communicated, people from different backgrounds of error and ignorance come into a growing understanding of the ‘*one hope’* (4:4), an increasing dependence on the ‘*one Lord’* (4:5) and so to a developing appreciation of the ‘*one body’* (4:4). It is by faith that the people of Christ are united to Him, and in being united to Him they realise their own unity with one another.

The second description of the goal is ‘*unity … in the* *knowledge of the Son of God’* (4:13). Paul is thinking beyond accepting creedal truths about Christ. The ‘*knowledge of the Son of God’* is a personal, experiential knowledge. It overlaps with our knowing ‘*the love of Christ’* (3:18) which ‘*surpasses knowledge’* (3:19) but which causes us to *‘be filled to the measure of the fullness of God’* (3:19). Interestingly, when Paul speaks of the relation of Jesus to His church and to the Father’s purpose, he regularly uses the title ‘Christ,’ but when he describes Him as the object of our faith and knowledge in which we find our unity, he speaks of Him as ‘*the Son of God*.’ The church’s goal is not Christ here but its own maturity and unity which comes from knowing, trusting and growing up into Christ (Romans 1:4; Galatians 2:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:10).

This ‘*knowledge of the Son of God’* involves a full experience of life in Christ and is encompassed in Paul’s third description, to *‘become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*’ (4:13). *‘Become* *mature*’ translates two words. The first, *teleios*, carries the thought of full development (1 Corinthians 2:6; 14:20; Hebrews 5:14) while the second signifies adulthood (1 Corinthians 13:11). The term is singular. Maturity involves unity. The many become ‘*one new man’* (2:15). This ‘*one new* *man*’ is to ‘*become mature’* here described as ‘*attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ’* (4:13), the fullness which Christ possesses and bestows. Christ is Himself the fullness of God (Colossians 1:19; 2:9) and He desires that we be filled completely with Him. The glorified Christ provides the standard to which His people aim. This is human life as God intended it to be, measured by all we understand the life of Christ to be.

Although this growth into maturity is corporate, describing the church as a whole, it clearly depends on the maturing of its individual members: ‘*Then we will no longer be infants’* (4:14). We are to be like children in humility (Matthew 18:3) and innocence (1 Corinthians 14:20) but not in ignorance or instability. Children can be like small boats in a stormy sea, very much at the mercy of the winds and the waves. Paul paints a graphic picture, *‘tossed back and forth by the waves’* and ‘*blown here and there by every wind of teaching’* (4:14). ‘*Blown here and there’* translates a word sometimes used of violent swinging. Paul is describing immature Christians who don’t seem to have settled convictions and who find themselves driven along by ‘*every wind of teaching*.’ Paul readily recognised that some Christians could be deceived and go astray without knowing because there were people lying in wait to deceive (2 Timothy 3:13). Their activities are described by two words. The first, ‘*cunning*,’ means playing with dice (and so trickery or fraud). The second, ‘*craftiness’*, is used in 2 Corinthians 11:3 of the guile of the devil himself (cf. Luke 20:23). When people wander away from the truth, they too often use ‘*deceitful scheming*’ to lead others to follow them.

Preachers of the truth stand in complete contrast to such methods (2 Corinthians 4:2). They are ambassadors of the truth are so are found ‘*speaking the truth in love’* ([4:15] literally: truthing in love). The NIV adds ‘*speaking’* but the more literal meaning would be ‘doing truth in love’ or ‘acting truly in love,’ maintaining, living and doing the truth. Paul has picked up an Old Testament expression used especially when truthfulness between two parties was needed (Genesis 47:29; Joshua 2:14; Judges 9:16). Truth becomes hard if not softened by love; love becomes soft if not strengthened by truth.

What is upheld and the way it is supported are to be in complete contrast to those described in 4:14. Those described there deceive others for their own gain. In contrast Christians are to present the truth so it brings spiritual benefit to others. Our motivation is to be genuine love.

‘*We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ’* (4:15). Our growth is *‘into* *Christ*’ so that increasingly, all of our life finds its centre, object and goal in relation to Him and in union with Him. Growth is from Him as its source and under His direction. The members can be healthy and strong but only as each lives their life dependant on Him.

‘*From him the whole body, joined and held together …*’ (4:16). The body derives its whole capacity for growth and its direction as one co-ordinated, directed entity from Christ alone, its head (cf. Colossians 2:19). It is from Christ that the body, in all its parts, receives its very life. By His power it is ‘*joined … together*,’ a word used in 2:21 of the building growing into ‘*a holy temple in the Lord’* and a word used for a joint in the construction of a building, or for the shoulder joint of the body. The other term, ‘*held together*,’ is used in a more general way of bringing things or people together, of reconciling those who have quarrelled, and of putting together facts in an argument or course of teaching. Both terms give the sense of functional unity, only made possible by the direction of the head.

The next term, *‘by every supporting ligament’* (4:16) is literally ‘through every joint of the supply.’ Most translations opt for a medical application. If this was Paul’s thinking, it probably means that through every joint with which the body is equipped, growth and functioning are possible. This being so, the body depends for its growth and its work on its Head, for Christ’s direction, on His provision for the whole, and on His arrangement for the interrelation of the members as well.

‘*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows …*’ (4:16). The church, the body of Christ, functions as each member, joined to every other member, draws its life and takes its direction from its Head. This functioning causes ‘*growth*,’ (Greek: *energeia*), growth by the energising of God in the whole.

*‘From him the whole body … builds itself up in love, as each part does its work’* (4:16). Only as each member is motivated by genuine love (agape) will they seek the upbuilding of all and not just themselves. The bond that unites the members together is the bond of love (1:4; 3:17; 4:2; 5:2). Each part has to do its work for this to happen.

Here is Paul’s vision for the church. God’s new society is to display love, unity, diversity and growing maturity. These are the characteristics of ‘*a life worthy of the calling you have received’* (4:1).

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

‘The Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians’ (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by F. F. Bruce (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984)

‘Ephesians’ (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by F. Foulkes (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1989)

‘The Message of Ephesians’ (The Bible Speaks Today Series) by John R. W. Stott (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1999)

‘The Prison Letters (Paul for Everyone)’ by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

‘Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words’ by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)