

Be Firm in the Truth

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; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:14, 15).

The last time we heard from the Pastor's Study we were instructed in the first verse of this chapter to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." This time we once again look at another admonition from the apostle Paul as he applies the doctrinal truths which he gave us in the first three chapters of this letter. Although written to the whole church of Christ, this word can be applied specifically to the youth of the church. Youth are like tender saplings which can easily be bent or broken by the winds of false doctrine. Thus the exhortation to "be firm in the truth."

There are two figures in the text. First, there is the figure of a child, of an inexperienced babe, that can easily be led astray and is inclined to follow others. Second, there is the figure of a ship. It sails across the ocean and is met by angry waves and all kinds of contrary winds, which the apostle calls winds of doctrine. A ship must have a strong helm. And at the helm of the church there must be a strong helmsman. The helmsman is Jesus Christ who steers the church to the safe destination of that eternal harbor. He uses his word which he has revealed to us in the holy scriptures, and by his Holy Spirit.

Negatively, the youth of the church must be firm over against all kinds of false doctrine. You are like a ship crossing a storm-tossed sea that meets all kinds of winds which, if not fought against, will prevent the ship from reaching a safe harbor, her proper destination. These winds try to drive the ship off her course so that it gets nowhere and is even shipwrecked.

So also are false doctrines in relation to the church of Christ. There are all kinds of false doctrines. Not one doctrine of the truth as it is in Christ has not been denied or attacked. The holy scriptures are denied as the infallible record of the word of God. Also attacked are the doctrines of the Trinity, predestination, the natures of Christ, his atonement, resurrection, exaltation, and his coming again. There are the truths concerning the church, the means of grace, and the sacraments. Many not only have been but are the false winds that seek to throw the church off its straight course, most recently the old heresy of denying justification by faith alone as set forth by the proponents of the Federal Vision.

The question is why? What motivates these false teachers? Is it because they simply honestly err? Do they not know any better? Are they simply honestly presenting what is their conviction? In answer we do not have to depend upon our own opinion. The answer is in our text. It is because of the sleight of men, cunning craftiness, and because they lie in wait to deceive. Scripture has no patience with men of such like and warns us that we must not even say good-bye nor receive into our home those that do not teach the truth of Scripture.

The sleight of men in the original makes one think of the game of gambling. One gambles with the truth. They do so for filthy lucre, not because they love Christ or his church. Such a one fleeces the sheep rather than feeds them. They seek their own carnal ambitions. Such is a false prophet.

One who practices cunning craftiness plays hocus pocus with the truth. They twist and twist the truth in such a way that you no longer can recognize it from the lie. One who speaks the truth can do so clearly, unambiguously, so that you do not have any question as to the truth. Only when you exercise cunning craftiness, play hocus pocus with the truth, do you have to camouflage it.

Why? Because they lie in wait to deceive. All these things belong together. The gambling part of it is the selfish motive of their own ambition and filthy lucre. Cunning craftiness is the method that they employ. All with the purpose to deceive the people of God into believing that the lie is the truth.

Therefore, the apostle warns you young people as well as the whole church of Jesus Christ. Thus, also the exhortation to not be as children, meaning that one must not be easily led astray, but strong in the truth. These false doctrines will come at you from many different ways. You will not be able to prevent your coming into contact with all these false doctrines. By the grace of God you must use these false doctrines to establish the truth. God uses them to wake up the church that it may be set strongly against false doctrines. The calling of the church is to develop the truth over against the false doctrine. Instead of being docile in regard to false doctrine, one must be strong and say "No!"

If tossed about by every wind of doctrine we lose Christ. The text says that we must grow up, grow up into Christ. Without Christ we have nothing, for in Christ as the organic head of the church is all our salvation. Therefore, we must grow into Christ in order that we may grow out of Christ, become like him, conformable to his image.

Positively, then, you must be firm with a view to the truth. You must grow into Christ. Just as a little tree strikes its roots into the soil so you must strike your roots into Christ. If God in his grace gave us roots so that we are able to strike into Christ, then

we seek all our food, all our nourishment, all the spiritual blessings from Christ alone. Hence, we strike our roots deeper and deeper into Christ. If we do that, then we must not have false doctrine. There is no other Christ than that of the Scriptures. As soon as you depart from the truth of the Scriptures and follow false teachers, you lose Christ, you strike your roots into the wrong soil. The result is that you suck poison into your soul instead of Christ.

Not only must you grow into Christ, but you must also grow out of Christ so that all the manifestation of your life becomes like Christ. As one grows into him, one derives everything out of him; and deriving everything out of him, one becomes conformable to his image. In this way you and I work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

This is all a very serious matter. One cannot be indifferent with respect to the truth. You may not gamble with the truth. It is either...or, not both...and. Therefore, grow up into Christ in all things. You must not grow into anything that is outside of Christ. You must have nothing to do with that which is foreign. Both in one's inward life and outward manifestation and walk of life one must grow spiritually into and out of Christ.

You can do this by speaking the truth in love, the truth as it is in Christ. That must be done in love. It must not be the goodie-goodie love of man which embraces false doctrine and which does not want controversy. But it must be the love of God, that which he has towards his people in Christ, the love which he puts into our hearts so that we taste it. This love will find its response by the grace of God in the love of us to God.

That, young people, is your calling. Speak the truth in love; put away all false doctrine, and grow up into Christ. In this way the Lord pours out his blessings.