

# Don't be influenced by bad constituents

Ephesians 4:14 (HCSB)

*Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit*

**Theme:** maturity and unity

**Point:** lack of spiritual growth causes instability

**FCF:** immaturity

**App:** grow in the faith

## Synopsis

We grow in our maturity so that we won't be easily influenced by the cunning techniques used by erroneous teachers and their heresies.

We learned last week that we are called to grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

To be made *experientially* perfect and mature in Him.

## Another description of maturity seen in v.14's *negation*:

don't be "little children" (subject of sentence)

## Little children are... (after conversion - proly Gentile converts)

when a child is born, they can't do basic things--that's not bad. But it is if they stay that way! (she eats anything)

### • **tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching**

• *tossed and blown around*<sup>1</sup> κλυδωνιζόμενοι - **easily influenced**<sup>2</sup> (more footnote)

• *every wind of teaching* - **heresy** (not disagreement, but false teaching that dilutes the gospel)<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. **by human cunning** (κυβεύω - lit. dice-playing)

may have indicated dice that were loaded<sup>4</sup> ["authority," sound-bites, one-liners]

• **with cleverness** (ἐν πανουργία - craftiness) *synonym to the preceding noun for intensity*

• **in the techniques** (μεθοδεία) Rare word used only one other time in the NT...

Eph. 6:11 (HCSB)

Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the *tactics* of the Devil.

• **of deceit** (πλάνε - wandering, roaming) in the NT it tends to mean "error"

maturity and unity (an infant is helpless, but in a home, there is *corporate* growth)

this is the natural life-course for Christians: growing together in Christ

not only is it unnatural to abstain from community growth, but it's dangerous.

## If y'aint growing in the gospel together you'll be easily influenced by counterfeit gospels

<sup>1</sup> This same phrase shows up in James 1:6

<sup>2</sup> Harold W. Hoehner. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2002) 561

<sup>3</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln. *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*. (Thomas Nelson, 1990) 258.

<sup>4</sup> Harold W. Hoehner. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2002) 562

Ross Douthat wrote that the religious blame the new atheist's unbelief for the problems in our nation, while new atheist's blame religion. But it's neither...

## Ross Douthat

"America's problem isn't too much religion, or too little of it. It's *bad* religion: the slow-motion collapse of traditional Christianity and the rise of a variety of destructive pseudo-Christianities in its place"<sup>5</sup> (Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics, 3)

## Do any counterfeit gospels affect our culture today?

In 2005, sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton conducted a nationally representative study of the religion and spirituality of teenagers in order to provide a "distinctive window through which to observe and assess American religion as a whole"<sup>6</sup>

What they found was startling:

youth are are very open to faith and religion  
they're just not very serious about it.

But because they've been raised in religious backgrounds, they grow up with it almost being a type of background noise that's just kind of...there but not important enough to grow in, learn about, or conform to. The result:

### Therapeutic Moralistic Deism<sup>7</sup>

- Moralistic ~ try hard, and God will reward you
- Therapeutic ~ God will make you feel better about yourself
- Deism ~ God will not bug you too much

### Christian Smith

"The language, and therefore experience, of Trinity, holiness, sin, grace, justification, sanctification, church, Eucharist, and heaven and hell appear, among most Christian teenagers in the United States at the very least, to be *supplanted by the language of happiness, niceness, and an earned heavenly reward.*"<sup>8</sup> (emphasis added)

What is the religious tenor of our culture?

A shell of Christianity--the inside supplanted by a language of feeling good.

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<sup>5</sup> Ross Douthat. *Bad Religion: How We Became A Nation of Heretics*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012) 3.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005). 5.

<sup>7</sup> This phrase (TMD) was coined by Christian Smith, who's research on the subject describes American teens as "simply colonizing many established religious traditions and congregations in the United States, that it is becoming the new spirit living in the old body." Basically, Adolescents are ok with religion but ignorant and indifferent to its concepts. Religion among American teens is getting a makeover. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005). 166.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 171

We can certainly see this in two gutless forms of pseudo-Christianity:

### **Religious Relativism**

the doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute.<sup>9</sup>

e.g., *New Thought* or *Higher Thought*

It is the “religious message with the most currency in American popular culture,” perhaps seen best in Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Love, Pray*, and championed by Deepak Chopra, Eckhart Tolle, etc.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes described as *spiritual but not religious*, and seeks to deify the individual, and is often critical towards institutional religions, absolute truth, or anything that suggests authority.

New Thought easily takes root in that therapeutic culture of self-worship we live in today.<sup>11</sup>

### **Prosperity Theology**

The doctrine that Christians are entitled to material wealth and healing by the power of metaphysics (which is described as faith and confessed words).

As a result, traits of this theology lead its proponents to instruct Christians in positive speech, the power of words, and financial donations (described as the Sower’s seed). In this theology, God is nothing more than a big lackey who does the bidding of those who can control him.<sup>12</sup>

If you do the right things, God will bless you with what you want. (moralism)

illustration: my upbringing in prosperity theology

*From Kenneth Hagin to Joel Osteen* (bad theology adjusts its face)

#### **Joel Osteen**

Our words are vital in bringing our dreams to pass. It’s not enough to simply see it by faith or in your imagination. You have to begin speaking words of faith over your life. Your words have enormous creative power. The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it. This is a spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> New Oxford American Dictionary

<sup>10</sup> Ross Douthat. *Bad Religion: How We Became A Nation of Heretics*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2012) 215.

<sup>11</sup> Jean M. Twenge, and W. Keith Campbell’s extensive research reveal that our culture is growing more in love with itself than ever. “We set out to determine whether the pervasive trend toward self-admiration in America extended to narcissism....By 2006, two-thirds of college students scored above the scale’s original 1979-85 sample average, a 30% increase in only two decades...the upswing in narcissism appears to be accelerating.” *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. (New York, NY: Free Press, 2009) 30.

<sup>12</sup> The prosperity theology is far more perverted than simply demanding money from God. It twists many elementary doctrines of Christianity, including the atonement. For a more exhaustive study, check out Hank Hanegraaff. *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*. (Thomas Nelson, 2009)

principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad, positive or negative.<sup>13</sup> (Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential.)

Those false teachings that have decimated the lives of many undiscerning Christians have not disappeared on the horizon of spiritual trends, they've simply adjusted--and like a virus, have replicated, multiplied, and taken over within the body of Christ.

Surprisingly, many adherents are genuine God-fearing Christians.

Those who have been captivated by such counterfeit gospels are being...

"This is depressing. Why don't you talk about unity, and warm fuzzy things, and grace."

**Acts 20:27-30, ESV**

**AP!**

I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

**1 Timothy 4:16, HCSB**

Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Saved from what Paul??

**From being little children tossed about.**

To grow in our maturity so that we won't be easily influenced by the cunning techniques used by erroneous teachers and their heresies.

Want your best life now?

**I've been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live...<sup>14</sup>**

You ain't got money, but you still got joy?

**I don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.<sup>15</sup>**

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<sup>13</sup> Joel Osteen. *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*. (New York: Warner Faith, 2004), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Galatians 2:20, ESV

<sup>15</sup> Philippians 4:11-13, HCSB

This isn't intended to be an exhaustive list of bad theology (that would take forever), but to show you a "wind of teaching" that pulsates through these counterfeits like a fine stitch...

## **Consumerism**<sup>16</sup>

*Treating the body of Christ as a dispenser of consumable commodities and services.*

Romans 12:2

We combat religious consumerism by "reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's son...measured by Christ's fullness" (13)

- measured by Christ's fullness: joyful sacrifice and surrender

## **Are we maturing as a body?**

Well...we know we are entrenched in a culture of consumeristic idols.

But are we being influenced by them, or pushing against the current?

Lookie...

gathered worship: repentance and healing (discipleship)

prayer: more people growing in prayer

men's ministry: growing, deep, leaders raised, hearts and marriages changed

T2 women's ministry: 200+ women growing in theology together

scattered

mission: people are doing life together outside of the corporate assembly

comm groups: 450 people (down in numbers, but up in transp/comm/unity/love)

new leaders being raised up out of them

Volunteering: servants down at some campuses

Giving: down at all 3 campuses (42% reduction in # of people tithing from 2011-2012)

Does it look like we're growing in the fun things, but not in self-denial

Sadly, an aversion to self-denial is more normal for Christians than you may think...

**Scott McConnell**

The survey reveals 64 percent of churchgoers agree with the statement: "A Christian must learn to deny himself/herself in order to serve Christ." Nineteen percent disagree with the statement.<sup>17</sup>

If we are growing in good experiences, but not in self-denial, **we are not growing.**

we are being blown about by the wind of consumerism.

it's about more than serving or throwing in a couple bucks...it's a heart issue, making it more than we realize: it's everything! **God ain't out to change your behavior...but your life.**

Matthew 16:24, NASB

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

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<sup>16</sup> Matt J. Rossano, "I'm sympathetic to the view that humans will, either by design or default, end up worshipping some god, if by god we mean 'that to which we willing offer service and sacrifice in exchange for a sense of meaning and purpose.'" *Sacred Brands: Consumerism as Modern Religion*. December 12, 2010. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-j-rossano/sacred-brands-consumerism\\_b\\_789303.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-j-rossano/sacred-brands-consumerism_b_789303.html)

<sup>17</sup> Russ Rankin. *Study: Obedience Not Easy Decision for Believers*. Lifeway. October 23, 2012. <http://www.lifeway.com/article/research-survey-obedience-not-easy-decision-for-believers>

**Normal Christianity is a radical call to self-denial.**

But I don't want to settle for normalcy. I want to be Spirit-filled.

But at some point, one must recognize that Christianity is not a game.  
It is more than self-actualizing oneself.

**Christianity exists as the hope of the world because someone had to die.  
Now, He calls you to die with Him.**

**Don't be led astray by a consumeristic Christianity!**

It sounds good because it promises you surface goods. But think about it:

You only get what you put in (moralism/legalism), and if you fail, you get failure.

Gospel: you don't deserve what God's got, but he lavishes it on us for free.

He gives you everything.<sup>18</sup>

He asks of you everything.<sup>19</sup>

This isn't about apprehending your salvation.

It's about enjoying your salvation.

The most abysmal part about consumeristic religion is that it rips you off from enjoying Jesus in every aspect of life, including the counter-intuitive call to self-denial.

**Matthew 13:44 (HCSB)**

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure, buried in a field, that a man found and reburied. Then in his joy he goes and sells everything he has and buys that field

The person who has discovered Jesus can find no other replacement on Earth.

When Jesus is your treasure, you hold \$ less tightly, becoming more generous.

When Jesus is your satisfaction, you need no other approval, and can love freely.

When Jesus is your Savior, you want to serve others the way you've been served.

But this must be born from above.

**We need the Water of the Word, and the Holy Spirit to apply it to us.**

You're going to have conflicts, disappointments, failure, suffering....

and the world/satan/culture will be there to tell you how to make sense of it all.

But let the hope of our hearts say, *You alone have the words of eternal life*<sup>20</sup>

Let this be our common confession and common practice: *We have the mind of Christ.*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Romans 8:32 (HCSB) "He did not even spare His own Son but offered Him up for us all; how will He not also with Him grant us everything"

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 10:37-39 "The person who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; the person who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Anyone finding his life will lose it, and anyone losing his life because of Me will find it" cf. Matt. 13:45-46

<sup>20</sup> John 6:68

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16