

Ephesians Series

11. Mature in Christ [Sermon Notes] Ephesians 4:7-16

Last time: We should live a life worthy of the calling you have received

Why did Paul have to say this and then take 3 chapters to spell out what he meant? These verses help

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 men in their deceitful scheming.

The main problem with the Church in Ephesus is same as the problem with countless of God's people in Britain today. They are infants - or worse - they are spiritual Peter Pans. They have never grown up.

And what happens to us - we are tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine as the AV puts it. When we are challenged about our faith, we end up getting battered and sunk because we don't know what we really believe and why we believe it. Why? Because we are infants - babies. We can't stand on our own two feet

We lack the maturity to understand the spiritual issues - what is at stake. That is why we don't understand the urgency of our situation.

And what are infants like

- ➡ do their own things
- ➡ fix their minds on one idea
- ➡ don't look at things reasonably
- ➡ are creatures of habit, usually bad ones
- ➡ don't think things through.

Too many Christians are mature adults but immature believers.

But what does Paul encourage us to do - , I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. The church in Britain is full of old believers but very few mature ones.

Last time Paul summed up for us what sort of calling we had towards one another.

And what sort of life - a life of love for one another - recognising that we have all the same status. None are more superior before God - we are all called to be part of the Church we are all called to be the children of God. That's why we are called to humility, to meekness, to patience to love.

How we love the idea of being superior - I'm a Baptist - my faith is more pure than anyone else's. I'm an evangelical, I hold certain beliefs. So and so has flaky beliefs on this and that. I must be superior. Unfortunately you're not - you've been saved by the same grace.

There are no superior redeemed children of God. Nobody's more superior than anybody else.

A W Tozer: It is important to note how much the Bible has to say about the common people—the plain people. The Word of God speaks with such appreciation of the common people that I am inclined to believe they are especially dear to Him. Jesus was always surrounded by the common people. He had a few "stars," but largely His helpers were from the common people—the good people and, surely, not always the most brilliant.

That being said. Paul recognises that even though we are all objects of grace, that grace was apportioned differently.

4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 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.

This evening I'm going to come back to these verses and try to unravel them as there are some big issues within them. But this morning I want to follow the broad theme. God wants us to be mature. We may be all the same but according to His grace and not our merit or superiority, we have been given these people. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.

One of these days I'll do some teaching of gifts (in fact I'm going to focus a little on these five tonight). If we look in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 we will see that we have ALL been given gifts according to His grace. (show lists). Gift in Greek is Charisma - grace is Charis. A gift is something that is given without merit - a product of the grace of God. But it's easy to get distracted here.

So let's look at what's being said. First of all Paul tells us of unity in Christ - we are all the same, so let's act in humility to one another.

"Just a minute, Paul", I can imagine someone saying. "If that's the case, then who are you to tell us what to do". "And for that matter why should we listen to our leaders because they are no better than us!!".

4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

All the people gifted by God in the list in verse 11 are all recipients of what are key gifts. They have a responsibility to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. To what end 13 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.

That's why they are given according to the grace as Christ has apportioned it. No-one of these can say I'm super-spiritual; because the gifts are given without merit.

That's why in body of Christ there are people with specific responsibilities to encourage others to grow. They are there to bring us to maturity. I'm going to look more into their individual roles this evening. Why should Paul focus on these five when he gives extensive lists in other places? It's simply this, if we are to grow into maturity as the people of God, we need to know what maturity is, and to be guided in it. These are gifts of authority - each of them speak with the authority of God. They speak God's mind and will to people. These gifts help us to know what God's will is - His general will as revealed by Scripture and his specific will for us now which is revealed by His Spirit to us. Between them these folks can equip us to go from obscurity to maturity. Tonight I'm going to have a look at these verses and gifts and see if we can throw some light on them.

But this morning I want to focus on this idea of maturity.

What characteristics do we have as we grow into maturity?

➤➤ ***we are prepared for works of service to build up the body***

Works of service - we are called to service and God has provided us with gifted people who will prepare us for works of service. The question more is are we prepared to serve God wherever He calls us to go? Do we even know what God wants us to do? Or do we prefer to not know because we are comfortable and we can't be bothered to find out. And when something happens in our life that brings us spiritually low, that tosses our belief around, like infants we blame God for it all? But did we listen to Him? Did we want to? It's a challenge isn't it?

➤➤ ***to attain unity in the faith***

To become mature in Christ we need to all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. What do we mean by this. I talked about unity last week and somebody asked me what matters essential constituted - In one sense, essential matters are associated with the gospel and I said that something like our Church's Statement of Faith or maybe the EA? But it is more than that. The implication is not just we all agree about what we know about Jesus, but a unity of faith. Faith isn't belief, it's about TRUST. All our trust is in the same thing and our knowledge of the Son is the same.

Unity of trust is important. We are going to be called upon as a Church to make steps of faith. Steps of faith about outreach, steps of faith about the building. It's a step of faith in itself to believe that this church has any future. We are going up a steep incline as we consider our financial commitments - and the only real solution is to grow and that means spiritually as much as it means numerically. In fact we're going nowhere unless we come before God and commit ourselves to the path of maturity in Him.

It isn't knowledge about HIM. It is KNOWING Jesus. It's relationship. And we are called to grow in our relationship together.

Faith in Christ is not for individualists - we grow and become mature in Christ by reaching unity in our faith - by growing together. Why? Look at verse 15 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into 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.*

Why do we grow together? Because we're part of a body. Do you want to see this Church grow? The God is calling you to play your part, to do your works of service, to join in others to find His will, to do it in faith, to know Jesus and to be filled with Him.

Maturing as a Christian isn't just being encyclopaedic about the Bible. Have you ever come across a child prodigy? You know what I mean, the child who can do maths like a computer, but doesn't know how to play with other children. Prodigy maybe but a waste of time if they can't be a member of society. I heard of one child prodigy who went to Cambridge when she was about 13. Before she was twenty she had committed suicide. She just couldn't face life living with other people.

Maturity is achieved in the body of God's people. In growing together in love. Commitment to one another, Commitment to discerning God's will, to follow God's will. To be filled with Christ.

And through this we become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

What is a mature Christian - one who is filled with Christ. What is a mature Church - one that is filled with Jesus.

Glass of water illustration. When the glass is full up to the brim, if you move it just a bit then the water seeps out. Full up with Jesus - because when we're full up He just keeps on seeping out. As people come into this fellowship - do they see it filled with Jesus. Oozing out, seeping out. His presence, His power, His love.

That should be our vision for this Church. A mature church, full of mature Christians who are Christlike. In Chapter 5, Paul makes another massive statement - 5:1 *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Is it your desire to grow? Is it your desire to see Jesus glorified? Then we need to walk the path together. To listen to what God is saying to us. To recognise those whom God is raising up amongst us to know what the will of God is - and then to do it.