

Ephesians 4:11-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 August 2017

Preacher: Rick Woolfe

[0 : 00] I greet you first from Swansea. We were at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church last week worshipping and got to meet Paul's brother.

! And so he told all sorts of nice stories about his brother. And also greetings to you from Village 7 Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs in the United States.

And we appreciate the ministry that you all are doing and we bring greetings to you and we pray for you and ask that God would encourage you this morning by the preaching of his word.

Lori and I have three children, Caitlin, Christopher and Caleb. And the two older are married. And our daughter, Caitlin, has given us two beautiful granddaughters.

So it's a wonderful thing. Their names are Sadie and Ava. And Sadie is two years old and Ava was born in June. So they're two years apart.

[0 : 57] And for us, it's a joy. You know, FaceTime is a wonderful thing. So we live in Colorado. They live outside of Jackson, Mississippi. So they're 18 hours away driving. It's a long way. And so, you know, FaceTime saves us. And I think it saves our relationship.

So the girls really, especially Sadie, she knows who we are. So when we do get a chance to go visit, she recognizes Nano and Papa. And she comes and she embraces us and all that. It's so much fun to see them grow. For me to see Sadie, she learns new words, new expressions.

She grows in her learning and in her attention. And she's starting to get into things in some ways that are not so good. And so we just get to watch that and see her grow and mature. And then we have Ava, who's just brand new.

And to see her change almost every time we get on FaceTime and we look at her, her expressions, she's smiling more and making noises. Just a joy. It really is. Today, when we look at our passage that was read earlier, we see a picture of what Paul has in mind for the church as it grows and matures from infancy to adulthood.

Our youngest child, Caleb, is now just graduated last year from university and he's teaching for the first time. He wasn't a teaching major. He was a science major, chemistry.

[2 : 26] But there was a position opened up and they recruited him and asked him to come and teach in this school, chemistry. So we're on our knees praying for him because he has no idea what to get himself into.

And so it will be a great experience. As he says, Dad, I have to start adulting. I have to start living as an adult now that I'm out of university. And this picture here that we have is that kind of picture of what Paul desires for, not just us as individuals, but for us as his church.

I think specifically he's looking at the church in Ephesus and he's saying, this is the picture, this is the vision. I have for the church there in Ephesus.

And therefore, this is the picture of what Paul has for IPC healing as well. A picture of maturity and growth and being able to live out the Christian life in such a way.

When we look back at the very beginning of the passage that was read, and your pastor referred to it in the prayer, that I therefore, prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling which you have been called.

[3 : 43] And so here is this picture, this calling that we have as brothers and sisters, but as children of Christ, children of God in Christ Jesus. This is the calling that we have.

And Paul goes on to kind of unpack that and to see what does this look like. But the interesting thing for me in this passage, in this context, is that it's not just about individuals.

At least, you know, it's about the church. It's about the body. It's about us growing together, maturing together. What does it look like for us to live the Christian faith?

And so let us not kind of think about what it means for us to do this individually, but what does it look like for us to do this together as we walk with Christ?

Because I really believe that is Paul's desire for the church, Christ's desire for the church as well. In this passage, we also see that there's an expectation of growth, an expectation of maturing in Christ.

[4 : 51] So it's not that you want someone to stay small and immature in the Lord. Our youngest son, who is no longer our baby boy, because he's 6'3", and 250 pounds, he's a big boy.

And so, you know, I can't look at him and imagine that small little boy we have. But when he was small, and because he was our youngest, my wife would always say, when his birthday was coming along, getting close, Laurie would always say, oh, Caleb, please don't grow up, please don't grow up.

And he goes, oh, Mama, I have to grow up. And we did this for about 5, 6 years, and it was really cute. Oh, Mama, I have to grow up. And that's true, isn't it? We want, each and every one of us, we want the church to grow and mature in Christ.

So there are some expectations that we see in Scripture. 1 Corinthians 14 says, Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil, be infants.

But in your thinking, be adults. And then earlier in the same book, he says, Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly. Mere infants in Christ.

[6 : 05] I gave you milk, not solid food, for you are not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. What a terrible statement to the church. You're just infants.

You shouldn't be infants, but you're just infants. And I have to treat you such. And in Hebrews, he says, in fact, Though by this time you ought to be teachers, You need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again.

You need milk and not solid food. So these are written in the negative, you might say. Where he's kind of condemning the church and saying, You should be grown up by now.

You should be mature. You should be adults in Christ. But you're not. In Hebrews as well, he says this, That therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ And go on to maturity.

So the idea is, again, The expectation of growth in Christ. That expectation of maturing in Christ. Is there in the scriptures.

[7 : 15] And it's there for each and every one of us. And yet there is an issue, I think, Of spiritual babyhood in the church.

There's so many who are still infants when they should be adults. Part of that is, I think, Responsibility of the leaders and the elders of the church Who are not discipling people.

Or others not coming alongside them in the church And helping them grow. We've asked that question, What does a mature disciple look like at Village 7? Because if you don't have a target, You really don't know where to go and where to lead.

And so we say, Are those who are prepared to engage with their heads, Their hearts, and their hands, With God, His mission, That they're out there, both in word and deed.

And so we look at it and we say, Okay, what does a mature Christian look like? Well, in their head, They understand the scriptures. They understand who God is. They understand the gospel.

[8 : 19] And they also have a framework in which all of life fits under. Kind of like a Christian worldview. But they have that big picture. And they're guided and motivated by the word of God.

In their lives. But in their hearts, They have a love for God. They have a love for the lost. And they have a love for the body of Christ.

And they're motivated by that love that they have received in Christ. And then are pouring out into the lives of other people. And in their hands, They understand the gifts, The spiritual gifts that God has given them.

And they're using them to build His church and build His kingdom. They also are sharing their life and the gospel With those around them who don't know Him.

And they're also caring for others in the body of Christ. So that is a picture that we have kind of put together For what does a mature Christian look like?

[9 : 25] Because that's a desire that we have for every believer in the church. Paul gives us a picture here in our passage. Especially when we're looking at 11 through 16, Because it would take me months to unpack all the whole passage that was read earlier.

But just briefly, in the 11 through 16, Paul has given us a picture. What does a mature church look like? A mature Christian. And the first one is really understanding what are the roles in the church. And so we see that it says that He has given some as apostles, Some as prophets, Some as pastors, Teachers, Evangelists and pastors, Teachers, Or I think the ESVs are shepherds and teachers.

For what reason? To prepare God's people for works and service. There's some models of the church That I think have been propagated over the years and centuries probably That are not really biblical.

The first one is kind of like the pyramid. Where you have a pastor up on top. Where he's on the pinnacle of the pyramid. That is totally unbiblical when you look at the model of Jesus Christ As a servant leader.

[10:40] So that doesn't work. Another model that some might have is that He's the leader of the bus driver in a bus And everybody gets on. And he's driving, Kind of leading the direction of where that bus is going.

That's really not very biblical as well. It's more biblical to look at as a team. Maybe a rugby team or something like that Where they're working together.

And yes, While the pastor has specific roles, While the elders and deacons have certain roles, We're all doing this together. We're all working together. And so that's the picture that Paul, That Jesus gives us for leadership.

But in here it says, What is the role of the elder leader? The shepherd teacher is to Equip God's people for works of service. That means if, I didn't get a chance to look at the bulletin, But if it had a list of people who are on staff at the church, You know, Interns and those kinds of things, That you would also see a line that says, You know, Ministers in a sense.

We call them ministers, So I don't know what the right terminology is here. When we were walking in Wales, A guy was asking me about what I do in the States. I said, Well, I'm a pastor.

[11:58] And he kind of looked at me funny. I said, I'm a minister. And he goes, Huh? And then I said, A vicar? He goes, Oh, Yeah, Now I get it. Okay. And so whatever the terminology is here, That everyone is to serve in the church.

Everyone is called to use the gifts that God has given them. And their abilities to work in the church, To build the church, To reach the communities, For the sake of Jesus Christ.

It's not the pastor's job. It's not the elder's job. It's your job. Their job is to quit you. So Paul is turning things upside down here.

It's not the job of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It's the job of everybody. To be engaged in God's work. And there is no excuse. As Peter says, As each of us has received gifts, We're to employ it to the building up of the body of Christ.

We are to use what we are given. You can go to Romans 12, You can go to Ephesians 4 later on, And you can look and see that if you have a gift, It's to be used. So that's a picture of what it means to be a mature, Growing Christian.

[13:16] And so some things, If you look at all the scriptures, We don't have time to unpack all those passages. But basically it's very simple. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit, Each of us have received special gifts.

Spiritual gifts. Abilities to be used. Secondly, They are to be used, And they're to be used for the betterment of other people. Very simple. It just gets broken down to that, And it's, You have to figure out, What are my gifts, And how do I use them in the church?

So then we come to our second part of the picture. And part of the picture is, He talks here, And he says, That to equip God's saints for works of ministry, For works of service, For the building up of the body.

So that's it. For the building up of the body. Until we attain to the unity of the faith, And the knowledge of the Son of God, To mature manhood. And so that idea is that there's a growing, In this picture that Paul has, Of the mature church, And mature believer, Is that there's a growing knowledge, And faith, In Christ.

So the knowledge of Christ, We know comes from scripture. So you're gaining in your understanding of scripture, You're gaining in your application of the gospel, Into your life, And how it's lived out, In everyday life.

[14:35] And so you're attaining that, You're growing in that. But it's fascinating that, What he connects here is that, As we grow in faith and knowledge, Of the Lord Jesus Christ, We grow in

unity, With one another.

The more the gospel changes us, From the inside, The more there will be unity, In our midst. It's when we, Forget about the gospel, When we don't apply the word of God, In our lives, That we become self-centered, And petty, And divisive.

But it's only when, We truly are, Bringing and growing in the knowledge of Christ, That we are unified, Together for what God has called us to do. What God has called you, To do in this church, And in this midst.

It's interesting too, To me that, That all of it is focused on, Who Jesus Christ. It's knowledge of Christ, Growing into the fullness of Christ. You see that, It's all about Jesus, It's not about you and me.

It's not about your pastor, It's not about your leaders, It's about Jesus. And that's the focus, And that's the goal, And that's the target, For everything. Is it's all about Jesus.

[15:49] And then we see, Thirdly, Is that, When you're maturing in Christ, It says, Growing to the, To the measure of the statue, Of the fullness of Christ.

I long for that day, I don't know about you. In my own life, I long for that. I know it's not going to happen, On this side of heaven. But I long for it. I have way too many struggles, That are constant throughout my life, That I've had for years and decades.

That I just wish, Oh Lord, I wish you'd complete your work. I would like it now. And that's true for the church, Isn't it? Our church is broken and messy.

All around the world. We are a messy bunch. And we are the beautiful bride of Christ. It's amazing to me. That he describes us as a beautiful bride.

There's never an ugly bride, right? You go to a wedding, There are always beautiful brides. And, That's how he pictures us. In our brokenness, In our mess, In our struggles.

[16:58] But he, Is wanting us to grow, And to mature, Into the fullness of Christ. What a beautiful picture for us. And if we do have that, If we have that growing, If we're using our gifts, If we're growing in the knowledge of Christ, If we're growing in our faith, If there's unity in our midst, He says here, That so that, We, See that we, May no longer be children, Tossed to and fro, By the ways, And carried above, By every wind of doctrine, By human cunning, By craftiness, And deceitful schemes.

So what he's saying here is that, If we are maturing in Christ, We won't be easily, Uh, Distabled, And easily, Uh, Mark away, Off our path, And off our faith.

That our stability, You know, Is on Jesus, Who is our rock. At the end of the Beatitudes, Jesus gives us this illustration, If you build your house on the sand, And the storms come, And the waves come, Your house will collapse, And be washed away.

But if your house is built upon the rock, And he's the rock, The storms will come. That's a guarantee.

He says in John 16, Be of good cheer. First he says, You will encounter troubles. Ah, But be of good cheer, Because I've overcome the lift.

[18:31] He says, Storms will come into your life. Some of us will experience very, Very difficult things. Some of you are probably already there.

Some of you have been through those things. And some are waiting for us in the future. But if we build our faith upon Jesus, When those storms come, We will be stable.

When false teaching comes into the church, When false teaching is gone through the Christian churches, And it happens all the time. There's like new fads that come up, And people come with these crazy teachings.

And if we don't stop and examine them, According to the scriptures, We can easily be carried away. But if we are grounded in the word of God, If we're grounded in our relationship with Christ, If we're grounded with one another in unity, We won't be knocked off balance.

We won't be moved By the storms that come our way, By the false teaching that enter in To our midst. We will stand firm.

[19:41] And I look at this, And I see as a result of this, That this is something that happens though, Not individually. So when you're going through the storms, Do you isolate yourself, Or do you reach out to the body and say, I need you?

Because we're not called to walk this life alone. We're not called to grow in our faith alone. We are called to grow in Christ, To mature in Christ together, As the body of Christ.

As we share our lives with one another, As we use our gifts, As we walk through this life, Together. That's what makes the difference.

So do not try to do this on your own. But seek the community, Seek the body of Christ, To be a part of where you're going. Very important phrase right here.

In verse 15, He says, Rather. In contrast to. I've given you a picture of somebody Who's not mature in Christ, Who's tossed to and fro.

[20 : 56] I've given you a picture of what it means To grow and to mature in Christ. So what does that look like In kind of summary Of what I'm trying to say.

He says this. He says that rather You're speaking the truth in love With one another. We're growing in every way Because Jesus is our head.

The whole body Is joined together By ligaments Into one body That focuses on Jesus.

That's all about Jesus. That's following Him. Believing in Him. Serving Him. That that body Is brought together And it's unified As it's moving forward.

And then He says this. That the church Therefore the church The body grows Again He's saying the body Not just you and me individually. The body grows And is built up Because of this unity.

[22 : 06] And then He says one thing too That one of the characteristics That is noticed That's seen In a body That a church That is growing and maturing Is love For one another.

Love for the lost And ultimately And primarily A love for Christ. When I was being ordained I had an elderly Pastor Who had mentored me When I was a brand new Christian.

Brand new Christian. Grew up in a liberal church. Never heard the gospel. And so when I became a Christian I think around 20 years old. He took me under his wing.

He just kind of said I spent time with him. And this man had really bad Parkinson's disease. So his limbs would shake. When he would write me letters When I was in seminary They would be these Really hard to read scroll.

Because he's always shaking. So I wrote to him And I said Pastor Atwell I said I'm about ready to get ordained. What advice do you have For a young pastor?

[23 : 17] And he wrote back And he said It's really simple. Rich. Love God. Love His word. Love His people. That's good advice For all of us.

You see It's not just That's not enough. It's not enough for me Just to say Rich Love God And love His word And love His people. I have to do that In the context of community.

I have to do that In the context Of the church. The body of Christ. Because that's when All the practices Of the Christian life Are made real When we're interacting With one another.

More than they do Indivision. We're really looking forward To seeing Sadie and Ava Grow up. I just I always have been I just love To see how God Works in the lives Of young people Who are following After Him And to be able To look at them And to encourage Them in Christ.

I mean I look forward To discipling My grandkids In Christ. And I long For that day When I can see When they've grown up That the Lord Keeps us alive And all that And we get to see this To see them Grow into maturity And to find Their place Within the church.

[24 : 49] To find their place Within the body Of Christ. To start using Their gifts. Using their Abilities To further The kingdom of God. And just to see Them grow And mature.

I delight In that Anticipation. That Is Christ's Delight In you. In this church.

He has an Excited Anticipation Of where He's going to Lead you And direct you Individually But mostly As a body.

So if the Lord Would ever bring Lori and I Back It will be a Delight for us To see you Growing And maturing In Christ As a church.

Let me pray for us. Father we ask