

The Church's Growth into Maturity

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Date: 26 September 2021

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[0:00] It's good to see all of you this morning. Let us pray.

O Father Almighty, we beseech you as we come to your word now! Speak to us, we pray, in the hearing of your preached word.

Let me be a faithful vessel of your truth. For your people. Give us devoted hearts to love your word and bend our will to its obedience.

All this we cannot do without your spirit working in us and through us. So we ask that you pour out your spirit upon us. That we may rightly understand, rightly believe and obey you.

And as your body grow more and more into Christ our head. Who is the end of all our means? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

[1:02] Amen. Last week, if you remember, we looked at Paul's urging for us to walk in a manner which we are called.

With humility and gentleness. With patience and forbearance towards one another in love. And to what end did Paul tell us to do this?

It is all so that we may maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Paul then gave us the seven foundations in which the church unity is grounded.

Remember, one body, one spirit, one hope of our calling. We do not create the unity, do we? You know.

It is ours though, Paul says, to maintain. Christ has created the unity, but it is ours to maintain. But this unity that Paul speaks of in the church must not be confused.

[2:09] This is important. It must not be confused with uniformity. There is a distinction between the two. Throughout his letter, Paul has been careful to stress that the church is a diverse, multi-ethnic body.

We are different. We are not from the same cookie cutter mold. It is to God's glory and display of his wisdom that we are so.

That we are a diverse body yet united in Christ. And although one body, we are a wonderful mosaic of God's grace.

With our different hues and shapes. All testifying to the beauty of the gospel. This is what Paul says in verse 7 of our text this morning.

But grace was given to each one of us. According to the measure of Christ's gift. Grace was given to each one of us.

[3:12] The us there is not just talking about himself or just apostles. He is talking about the whole church. He is writing now to Ephesians. He is saying grace, God's grace was given to each one.

According to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives. And he gave gifts to men.

In saying he ascended. What does it mean but that he also descended into the lower regions. The earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended.

Far above all the heavens. That he might fill all things. Paul tells us. So to his body, the church. Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended king. Has given gifts. These gifts are in keeping with all of God's other blessings to us.

[4:09] They are given. Like all things that we get from God. They are given on the basis of God's grace. This means we haven't earned them.

And we don't deserve them. And therefore, there is no room to boast on account of them. But Christ, in keeping with his promise to build his church.

And uphold and sustain it against the forces of hell and evil. Gives a variety of gifts to the church. For that very purpose.

The imagery that Paul paints in these verses. It describes the bestowing of gifts. The image that Paul uses when he describes Christ bestowing his gifts on us. It's really important. Paul is actually referencing Psalm 68 verse 18.

[5:11] Where it says, You ascended on I. Leading a host of captives in your train. And receiving gifts among men. But did you know the difference between Psalm 68 verse 18.

And Paul's citation of that Old Testament passage? It's different because. Instead of Christ receiving the gifts. In Paul's citation.

It is Christ giving the gifts. The picture that Paul paints. Is of a conquering commander. Returning from war.

Having decisively defeated the enemy. And pillaged their land. And wealth. And taken captives. The image is something that a first century Ephesian will be familiar with.

See when a Roman commander. When a Roman general wins a notable war. He's given a triumph. When he returns to Rome.

[6:16] And the people receive him. As he comes into the city. Throngs. The whole city comes out. People receive him. As he's processed. Into the city.

As the conquering general. Going before him. Ahead of him. Into the city. Are the spoils of war. That he has taken. So the gold.

And the precious stones. The gods of the conquering nations. Even the captives. Especially maybe the enemy king.

Or nobles. Of that land. Are paraded. In chains. Into the city. Ahead of the conquering emperor. Emperor. And then comes the champion.

With laurel on his head. Riding in a chariot. To the cacophony. Voices of the city. Yelling his praises. It's a worshipful reception.

[7:16] Almost. That he receives. As he comes in. It's so worshipful. So much so that. Oftentimes. Customarily. A slave. Is hiding.

In the chariot. Of the commander. Whispering. In his ear. Memento mori. Remember. That you are man. So that he might not confuse.

The worship of the crowd. And not. And not forget. That he's a man. Not a god. This is the picture. That Paul paints. Of Jesus Christ.

Our risen and ascended Lord. Having conquered. Sin and death. Death. This is the triumphant picture. That he paints. Having conquered sin and death. Christ ascended to heaven.

In triumph. But he also talks. Note that he talks about. He who ascended. Was the one who descended. It's because.

[8:11] Jesus went through. A state. Of humiliation. For our sake. He was always. The ascending Lord. And God. But not counting equality.

With God's name. To be grasped. He emptied himself. He emptied himself. It descended. Taking the feeble form of man. It descended.

So much so. To death. On the cross. And the grave. For our sake. But he defeated. Both death and sin. For our sake.

His resurrection. Was a vindication. And a stem. Of his victory. According to Colossians 2.15. Paul says there. That. Christ has disarmed.

The rulers. And authorities. That is the powers. Of the world. The devil. And the flesh. Christ has disarmed them. And he has made a public spectacle.

[9:11] Of them. Triumphant over them. Do you see the correlation. Between the triumph. Of a conquering leader. Of a conquering general. And just.

As a Roman commander. Will be given. Will give some of the spoils. Of that war. That he has just won. To the citizenry. And then place the wealth. That he has just conquered.

Into the treasury of the city. In the same way. Christ. Our conquering Lord. Having claimed. And received. All these gifts. By right.

As victorious Lord. He now bestows them. On us. His people. The church. This is what Paul means. When he says. He gives gifts. To men.

So where is Christ? Where is he now? He is ascended. We serve. A risen. And ascended. King. He is ascended.

[10:09] To his place of power. And authority. And it is because. It is expressly. Because. Of his ascension. And his triumphal entry.

Back to the fighter's right hand. Having secured victory. That we have. These gifts. Without him ascending. We would not have the gifts. So I ask you. Do you have. Any spiritual gifts. As a believer in Christ. As a believer in Christ. Who is part of a local body.

Do you have. Any spiritual gifts. Let me answer that for you. The answer is yes. You might be wondering. Whether you do or not.

The answer is yes. Paul says. It is giving gifts. To all of us. If you are a believer in Christ Jesus. Hear this please. If you are a believer in Christ Jesus. You have given your life to him.

[11:08] You have surrendered to him. You are part of a local body. Of believers. You have been given gifts. By the risen and ascended Lord. You have been given gifts.

Through the spirit. For the building up of the church. The significance of this is that. If you are part of this local body. You are not insignificant. Your gifts.

That God has given you. Are meant to be manifested. For the building up of the body. You might not know.

That's all right. But it is in the context. Of life together. Within the body of Christ. That those gifts will be discovered.

What is the implication then? You can't be part of the local body of church. And live a solo Christian life. Your gifts that God has given you. Are meant to be used.

[12:09] In the setting of the local church. To build up the body. The ascending and triumphant Christ. In his present office.

As our king. And our high priest. As given a measure of grace. To every believer. But look in the following verses.

Paul now focuses. On a particular category of gifts. The gifts listed in verse 11 there. Some apostles. The apostles.

The prophets. The evangelists. The shepherds. And teachers. These gifts. In particular. Function specially. To equip the church. To equip the church.

So that they can exercise their gifts. For the work of ministry. The gifts that Paul mentioned here. By the way. These gifts are not exhaustive. Of all the gifts that Christ gives to his church.

[13:10] Paul is just highlighting. A specific category of them. In these verses. But the gifts here. Are given to some. And although.

They are still in operation. In the church. And benefit in the church. Not all the gift holders. Are present today. In the church. That might be a bit confusing.

The gifts. Paul highlights. In verse 11. Are still in operation. In the church. But not all the gift holders. Are present. In the church.

Today. That might not seem clear. But let's go through the gifts. And then. Maybe that. That. That will become more. More apparent to us. The first one is apostles.

The first gift to be mentioned. The word. Apostle. Is actually. A transliteration. From the Greek. Apostolos. So. Apostles. What it actually means.

[14:07] Is sent ones. Or someone. Who has been sent. Jesus Christ. Himself. Is the first. And primary. Preeminent apostle.

He refers to himself. As such. In John 17. As the sent one. From the father. And in John 20. Jesus does something.

After the resurrection. He appeared. Before the disciples. And he breathed. On them. And then he sent them. Gave him. Apostolic commission.

He sent them out. So the role. Of apostles. Is limited. And restricted. To. Those 12 disciples.

And. Matthias. Was added. To the number. Because there's a significance. To the 12. Later on.

After Judas. Died. And committed suicide. And then Paul.

[15:04] Later on. For example. In the New Testament. Was also an apostle. A few more. Were in the New Testament. Referred to as apostles. Such as. James. The brother of Jesus. And. Barnabas.

But the point is. That. The office. Of apostleship. Was. Meant to be. A foundational. Office. Of the church. Those who have.

Saw. Seen. The risen Christ. Were commissioned. And were commissioned. By him. Personally. Were those. Who were apostles. And Paul says.

Remember. Ephesians 2. Verse 20. Paul says that. Apostles. Are. Foundational. To the church. To this. Building.

That Christ is building. To this body. That Christ is making. So we no longer. Have apostles. In the church. But we have.

[16:09] Their inscripturated. Word. In the new testament. So the office. Of apostle. Is still in operation. Through. The word. The bible.

Right. But. This is important. To note. Many people. Will claim. To be an apostle. Nowadays. They might have. Different meanings. For why they. Make that claim.

But. They're not. To be compared. With the apostles. As is given. In the new testament. The foundation. Has been laid. Once and for all. We cannot.

Lay the foundation. Again. And we must not. Try to lay the foundation. Again. But it. The ministry of the apostles. Is important. For us. As the church. It is on the basis. Of their teaching.

It is the doctrine. That they have laid out. To the church. It is on the basis. Of their. Words. The written scriptures. That the church stands. This is why they're the foundation.

[17:04] It is on their base. On the basis. Of the scriptural word. That they've given to us. That we stand. As the church of Christ. And then there's the prophets. That was listed there too.

Those giving. Those giving gifts. To be prophets. To the church. Also serve. Referencing. Ephesians 2. 20. They also serve. As foundations.

Of the church. The foundation of office. The ministry. This. This is in distinction. From old text.

Testament prophets. This is a New Testament prophet. And the ministry. Of these New Testament prophets.

They operated. Alongside the apostles. Before the canon of scripture. Was closed. Before the New Testament. Had been written. Early on in the church. God gave some.

As prophets. To speak. God's divine words. To guide his people. And now. That God's revelation. Of himself. Is complete. In his word.

[18:00] And supremely. Has been completed. In Christ Jesus. As God's final word. Word to us. We do not have need. Of prophets. In the church. Anymore.

Now. This is. These two offices. Apostles and prophets. Are foundational. As I said. Before. To the church. There's a distinction here. I want to make though. The prophetic word.

Is still being spoken. In the church. Today. But it is based. On the foundation. Already laid. By the apostles. And prophets. You see the distinction there.

It's really important. If. If someone comes along. Today. And says. I am a prophet. And he's trying to lay. A foundation. Of prince. Thus says the Lord.

And it's not. In keeping. With God's revealed word. It's. Don't follow him. He's a false prophet. Or.

[19:00] False prophetess. So. And. When I say. The prophetic. The prophetic word. Is still being spoken. In the church. Today. What do I mean by that? What I mean.

Is that. The Holy Spirit. Still illuminates. The word of God. To us. Which is part of the function. Of the prophets.

Is to illumine. The word of God. To God's people. Well. So. Every time. Every time. Anyone.

Figuratively. Climbs. This pulpit. To proclaim.

The word of God. They are prophesying. God's word. And the power of the spirit. To God's people.

That's it. That's an important. Thing to. To know. And.

By the way. That is a fearful. Thing. Thing. To say. As a preacher. That's. Not something. To be taken lightly. That's why.

[19:56] And that's not something. That you. Want to take lightly. Either. As. As God's people. We hear God's word. That is why. What is done. When we gather. Every Sunday morning. When we open God's word.

And read it. And explain. And preach it. Is nothing less. Than a spirit led. Illumination. Of God's word. To God's people. That is also why.

As I've said before. I don't have the freedom. To preach. About my pet issues. Or even the current topic. Or events of the day. That's why.

Preaching. Through the books of the Bible. Or preaching. Through the lectionary. Is of a great benefit. And a gift. To us. As the. As God's church.

God's word. Is the standard. That shapes us. God's word. Is the standard. That shapes us. Rather than.

[20:53] The pastor's whims. Or the culture's. Present day noise. So. Paul says.

Apostles and prophets. Foundations of the church. No longer in operation. Their ministry. And their function. Through the word of God. Are still operating the church. For no one. Is an apostle.

In the present nature. And then the third thing. He says. Is evangelists. Evangelists. Are people. With special gifts. And callings. To devote themselves. To proclaiming.

The good news. Of the gospel. The word is used. As a noun. Only. Two other times. In the new testament. Apart from these. This. Here in Ephesians.

Verse 11. Philip. For example. Was described. As an evangelist. In Acts 21. That's one other time. It was used. Timothy. Was exhorted. By Paul.

[21:47] To do the work. Of an evangelist. In 2 Timothy 4. So we. We know very little. About the office. Beyond these few references. So it is wise.

Say this humbly. It is wise. Not to be dogmatic. About. About this. There are some. Who think. The office of evangelists. Like that of the apostles. And prophets. Are no longer.

In existence. In the church. That they have. A foundational role. In the life. Of the church. Now. This is my own opinion. But I think that.

The evangelists. Are still in operation. In the church. By the way. Doing the work. Of an evangelist. Which is. The preaching. The good news. Of Jesus Christ. Is something. That we are all.

Called to do. Right. So I don't want you. To read that. Oh. Evangelists are the ones. That preach the good news. Okay. I don't have to do it anymore. No. No. We are all called. Actually. And I think when Paul says that.

[22:42] To Timothy. Not necessarily that Timothy has. Sit and offers an evangelist. But he's asking him to do the work of an evangelist. To preach the gospel. The goodness of Jesus Christ. We all ought to be doing the work of an evangelist.

But there are people. That God has specially graced. With giftings. People like George Whitefield. Or Franklin Graham.

A man who I think has. Been specially graced. By God. With this gift. To preach. To lost souls. And to bring people.

Into God's kingdom. And then. The final. Giftings. Grace. That Paul refers to in verse 11. Is pastors and teachers. Now.

Pastors and teachers. Are also. An ongoing office. Within the church. The word pastor. Simply means shepherd. It is used metaphorically.

[23:36] For leaders. In the. In the ancient world. So it means shepherd. But. For example. David was also. Although he was a shepherd. By trade. Before he was anointed. He was also referred to.

As a shepherd of Israel. Even as king. In the same way. Moses. Was sent. To have shepherded Israel. Through the wilderness. So there are some.

Who think. That these are. Two different. Ministries. Two different. Offices. Or something. That is one ministry. Functioning. In two ways. At the very least.

All pastors. Must be able to teach. Whereas. All teachers. Need not be pastors. But. This is an ongoing office. And it's based.

On the foundation. Of the apostles. And prophets. That has already been laid. Paul then says. All of these. All of these. Offices. Are to equip.

[24:33] Look in verse 12 to 16. To equip the saints. For the work of ministry. For building up. The body of Christ. Unto we all attain.

To the unity of the faith. And of the knowledge. Of the son of God. To mature manhood. To the measure. Of the stature. Of the fullness. Of Christ. Paul shows.

The significance. Of these gifts. In the church. Remember that these gifts. Have to do with the ministry. Of the word. That is. The unifying things. About all of these ministries.

Are. They are to do with the proclamation. Of God's word. The emphasis. Paul wants us to see. Is that. For the church. As Christ's body.

For the church. To grow. Healthily. And in maturity. In strength. It must be grounded. In God's word. It is its food.

[25:31] And nourishment. Nothing else. Can sustain us. As the people of God. And without. Faithful attendance. To the word of God. We will wither.

And die. This is the reason. Why these gifts. Were given to the church. By Christ. To equip the saints. For the work of ministry. For building up.

The body of Christ. The very word. Equip. The Greek word there. Is a myrtical term. Used only. Here in the New Testament. And it means. To strengthen.

Or set. A broken bone. Or joint. A joint. That is what the word. Of God does. When it is faithfully preached.

And taught. In the church. It diagnoses. Areas in which we are spiritually sick. It mends. Areas where we are broken.

[26 : 28] It mends us. Thereby making us. Healthy. And fit. To do the work of ministry. This is why these gifts. Are foundationally important. For the church.

It's function. The work of ministry. Notice there. That the Bible. Does not say. That the pastor teacher. Alone. Does the work of ministry.

In the church. Paul didn't say that. No he didn't. Rather. He equips the whole body. To do the work. That's what. These offices are to do. That to. Equip the whole church. To do the work of ministry. To borrow an analogy. This is not original to me.

I'm borrowing it here. The church is not a train. Where. In which we. Everyone sits. In that. In their seats. Passively. Until. We arrive at our destination.

[27 : 23] That's not a church. Instead. The church is an orchestra. Where every member. Plays their part. In contributing. To the melodic symphony.

Now. How foolish would it be. If one person. Were to take it upon himself. To play all the instruments.

In an orchestra. It would be pointless. Even if attempted. It would be a farce. Christ. How foolish will it be.

For me to say. Well. I just want to do all the work of ministry in this church. or the vestry or just the Bible study teachers in the same way not one person in the church has all the gifts needed for the work of ministry in the church I'm going to repeat that not one person has all the gifts needed for the work of ministry in the church but together we have all that is needed because Christ has given each and every one of us gifts through the spirit and it is to what end until we all attain verse 13 to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ another sign of health in the church is that we are all growing in the knowledge of God united in our common faith in Christ we are to grow through the ministry of the word into a deeper knowledge of our savior to maturity as our sinful and weakened nature grows more and more into the image of his likeness now this work of growing into Christ is a continuous one in the church it continues until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the son of God that's our goal as a church or the trinity that's our goal and we're not there yet and we won't arrive there this side of eternity but God is working in us and through us and we should be seeing signs of that maturity displayed among us that is why the ministry of the word is needed it is to equip us for that work

I'm going to say something here that might shock your Anglican hears are you ready? the focal point of our Sunday service is the preaching of God's word now I say this as someone who believes that word and sacrament should go together I believe in weekly communion I think it is important that we partake of the Lord's body and blood every time we gather on the Lord's day but we cannot go we can go we can go without the sacrament for a season and not die that happened last year special times we can this can happen but the same hear me here the same cannot be said for the word of God our salvation our growth into maturity our spiritual health depends on constantly feeding on the word of God the coming together that we do at the Lord's table follows the preached word for this very reason both are vital both are vital means of grace by which Christ nourishes us and builds us up but the order in which it is given is significant look in verse 14 this is what maturity through the ministry of the word saves us from it's so that we will no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning by craftiness and deceitful schemes it's only through the ministry of the word that we grow from vulnerability of children into mature manhood this is an image that Paul is painting here and I love the contrast a mature man and an infant notice the contrast look at the frailties of a child

[32 : 31] I have a six man told underdeveloped musculature unsteady on their feet even when they can eventually learn to walk easily taken in by things gullible like object permanence is a thing kids you put something in front of them you take it away it's as if that thing doesn't exist anymore right that is infancy gullibility inability to set boundaries that these are the traits of infancy lack of discernment inability to see past the present spiritual immaturity is the same that's why the church

is described as a family we all of us are at different stages of maturity but in a family setting we are safe because we are meant to help one another to continue to grow into maturity right but immaturity is marked by ignorance gullibility and individualism when these traits are prominent in any local church when these traits are prominent in any local church that church is on dangerous grounds and in really bad health but look

Paul goes on look at the benefit of a mature church verse 15 rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love verse 15 and 16 paints the picture of a local church that is being equipped by a faithful diet in God's word such a church is marked such a church is not marked really by an absence of conflict right verse 15 and 16 they say there's not going to be conflict it's not a pie in the sky kumbaya kind of place where no one ever disagrees or get on each other's nerves that's not what maturity in the church looks like but it is a place where people are willing to speak the truth in love in love that involves seeking the good and well-being of the other even if it's at your own expense that's what that looks like that kind of maturity love is bound up with humility and gentleness and a willingness to maintain the unity of the spirit in a bond of peace we bear faithful witness to the gospel not only by faithfully believing

God's word so what I'm saying is that our faithfulness as Christians is not just based on right doctrine it is also by the manner and the motive with which we convey those right doctrines it is in love for the good of the other and the glory and honor of Christ so this is important knowing doctrine and theology is not the mark of Christian maturity you can know the Bible you can you can be able to say all the creeds that is not the sign of Christian maturity Christ likeness is resembling our elder brother Jesus resembling him in a gradually increasing manner in our life and words and interactions that's what

Christian maturity looks like are you striving to be more like Jesus how does one even do that how do we measure this as a church it is by the means of grace that the ascended and reasoned Lord Jesus Christ is given to us the church that's how we grow in maturity it is as we committed together to the word of God preached from this pulpit or in the weekly Bible studies and in your own personal reading of God's word it is by loving by a loving commitment to contribute your gifts to the church's growth it is by being a faithful member of the orchestra striving to play your part striving to play the right note as it's been given by

God the composer let us pray heavenly father we come before you Lord seeking to be able to exercise faithfully the gifts you've given all of us as your people thank you Lord that you are risen God and ascended king and you have gifts you've bestowed upon us through your Holy Spirit thank you Lord that these gifts are being displayed in this church I'm so grateful and I'm thankful Lord for the gifts you've given each and every believer here and the way they've been using them to advance the gospel to build your church I pray Lord that you will re-energize us to be committed to serving you Christ our king and lord faithfully exercising those gifts you've given us with humility not in a way to badger ourselves to take pride in it but to serve as you served us as you've shown us through your example and lord by your spirit may we continue to grow into maturity into Christ into our head we pray all of this in the name of our lord savior Jesus Christ amen amen amen amen

[39:36] MINMIN