

Maturity: Only in the Church

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[0 : 00] have a seat. If you have your Bibles, which you should have, right? Take out Ephesians chapter 4. I don't mean lead you on too much of a guilt trip, but if I have to, I will. So Ephesians chapter 4, where we're going to find ourselves today. But before I get in there, you'll notice in the bulletin and in our announcements, we are like membership crazy here at this church, right? We're meeting here for the next, I think, what, six meetings in the next eight days or something?

No, I'm just kidding. The one on the 24th is not happening, so you can scratch that off your calendar. So there's a kind of an emergency meeting on the 17th. There's something that we need to let our membership know about. If you are indeed a member here and you can't make it on the 17th, please schedule a time with me during this week to come and talk to me, all right? So we want to make sure everyone is brought up to speed on something. For those of you who are regular attenders, you haven't quite made the jump to church membership, we'd invite you to come to our business meeting because, you know, business meeting seems kind of boring and blasé, but it also lets you know, they're really not boring and blasé, they're really exciting and fun. But you get to see where our vision is, where we are investing our effort, our time, our money, and our prayers for this next coming ministry year. And we want you to be a part of that. We want you to know that. We would love to have you commit to that same type of commitment that we as members have made, both in, just like I said, just on our time commitment, our financial commitment, our prayer commitment. So, and if you're not here, we will let you know from the pulpit the next couple of weeks, just kind of where we're going as we unfold what the next ministry year looks like. So we are in the book of Ephesians. We're in chapter four. I'm going to read today's text to you. And it's in entirety. And then we'll go from there. Starting in verse seven of chapter four, Paul writes, but grace was given to each one of us 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 had 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. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until 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, so that we may 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. 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.

Paul, in this book, is teaching a new creation. This new creation is the church, and this church is made up of a new race of people. It's made up of Jesus-believing Jews and Jesus-believing Gentiles, and they are now one and regarded as one by God the Father. And this occurred through the power of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ's work on the cross. So we have these new people together, and they form what is known as a living temple. Paul talks about it earlier in the book of Ephesians.

And there's this new plan in place. So Paul is asking the question, all right, so you're a new people, so the obvious question is, so what?

Well, that is what the three chapters of Ephesians are all about. It tells us who we are. And now the so what is the implications of what it means to be a new race in this world.

[5 : 16] If you were with us at the beginning of chapter 4, Paul talks about the importance of unity that we are to have. Now, this isn't the type of unity saying, hey, you all have to have unity, so you just find the most lowest common denominator, and if anybody can hop over it, then we're all

unified. That's not what he's talking about.

He actually tells us seven things that we are to be unified in. One body, that is one church, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, who has one God and Father of all. Amen? That is what we are to be bound in. And Paul calls us to urgently walk in humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing one another.

If we can't do that, we will not be unified. And this unity, if you remember, Paul is telling us that Jesus Christ was the one who united us, and it's our job to maintain that unity.

So for lack of a better word, we're kind of a team, right? We're a team, and Paul's kind of this coach. So we got this team together, and then the obvious question is, so well, what's next?

[6 : 43] What's supposed to happen now? Well, we want to be a successful team. Well, what makes for a successful team?

If we're talking sports, it's to win. A coach, you imagine that, a professional coach. I know I'm going to use a hockey analogy, right?

We're going to bring this team together, and imagine the coach coming together and just saying, all right, who wants to play goalie? Right? Everyone knows at that point where they are.

We're not going to say, all right, Jimmy, you're playing goalie. You already lost your two front teeth, and you're as thick as an oak tree. You'll make a great goalie, right? No, it doesn't work that way.

Everyone kind of has their place by this time, and we know what we're trying to do.

But I want to ask you guys a question. What makes for a successful church? What does God mean to accomplish with this church?

[7 : 55] Obviously, it's to fulfill some sort of purpose, but what purpose is that? I guarantee you, if I took a poll, I would get various answers to that question.

Perhaps some of you would point to Matthew 28, 19, for we're to go into all the nation and make disciples of men, right?

We have a missionary mandate. We're supposed to be a missions church. We see this throughout all the book of Acts, and you know what?

That would probably be a good thing. So we wouldn't measure whether or not we are winning or being successful by the amount of missionaries we produce.

The fact is, we cannot ignore this mandate, but the question is, is that the true and real purpose of the church? Some of you might say, well, it's to meet the social needs.

[8 : 55] You would quote to me Matthew 25, and you would read me, For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.

I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me. So you would say, BK, we have a social mandate.

We have a mandate to engage the world, to feed those who have no food, to give clothing to those who have no clothes.

And we would measure our success by the amount of money we would dispense to those goals.

We would ask the question, how many people did we feed at the soup kitchen?

How many groceries did we give away? Don't get me wrong. That is a great emphasis. But is it truly the purpose of the church?

[9 : 52] The third reason what you might say the church is safe. It is a place where we come to be loved.

It's a place we come to be cared for. Why? Because it is a wicked world out there. BK, you don't know about my workplace and what goes on in there.

It is hard. So you would be justified as well to think that this place is supposed to be for us to get away from the battle that is in the world today.

Now, if you said it was a missionary church or a social needs church or a retreat type church, those are all good things.

But it gets back to what did Jesus Christ who died for the church want to accomplish primarily with this church.

[10 : 55] So let's turn in Ephesians 4 and take a look at it. We're going to begin in verse 11. And I'm kind of coming at, this is a very thick passage and we're actually going to be in here for the next several Sundays.

But it's a thick package. But I wanted us to come to an understanding of what Paul's trying to accomplish with the text so we can understand the instructions better on how to get there.

Right? So it's like looking at a map. I want you to see the destination, what he's trying to accomplish, and then we'll look at the directions on how to get there.

Are you with me on that? Okay. So turning to verse 11, he says, And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

Why? For building up the body of Christ. How long? Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of Man to mature manhood.

[12:04] And we can put in womanhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of God. We've read first that Paul's first goal is unity.

The second thing that Paul is after is maturity. He wants unity and maturity. And he uses this incredible word picture that everyone can understand.

A body. He uses this word body. The place the church has in God's kingdom is to simply mature the man and woman of Christ to the measure of the fullness of Christ.

Paul wants unity and Paul wants maturity. And like I said, we understand that's the goal. And today we're not actually going to talk about what makes or how to become a mature believer.

I want us to understand what is a mature believer. So this morning I'm going to look at four or we're going to look at four characteristics of a mature believer in Jesus Christ.

[13:19] The four characteristics are mature believers have an experienced faith. Mature believers have an experienced faith.

The second thing that mature believers are, mature believers are Christ-like. Mature believers are Christ-like. The third thing is mature believers know God's truth.

Mature believers know God's truth. And the final point we're going to look at is mature believers speak truth in love. So let's take a look at the first one.

Mature believers have an experienced faith. Pay attention to verse 13 where it says, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Now I've already referred to it. Remember that word unity? That Christ created a unity in him. This isn't the same type of unity that Paul is talking about here.

[14:28] He's talking about previously about the unity that Christ made for us. And what he's talking about is that faith that we found in those ones we spoke about are the objective truths we believe.

So our faith is based on objective truths. Now what Paul is talking about here is our subjective response to the knowledge of the Son of God.

And what that means is he's talking about the experiential knowledge that Christians have by walking with Jesus Christ.

That experience that happens when we walk through the valley of the shadow of doubt.

Those experiences and trials of life where we have walked and God has walked with us, carried us, lifted us up through.

[15:30] That is what he is talking about. This is someone who's tasted the goodness of God in incredible happenstance.

They have tasted God's sweet mercy when they felt that they could no longer taste anything but bitterness. This is someone who's tasted sweet grace when their whole world looked like it was falling down.

The fact is you and I know such people. There's people here who've had such trials that when you look into their life and you say, there's no way I'd survive that.

There's no way that if that happened to me, I would still be with Christ. And then you begin to look in awe of that person. Now what's really interesting is when you talk to those people, they don't look at themselves as being in awe.

Well, I'm great. I can really overcome this. No, God is there walking with them through these trials, through these times of pain and growth and turning them into something that they were never like before.

[17:02] It could be someone who's gone through the life-threatening disease. It could be someone who's lost a loved one, loss of a career, a loss of a relationship.

Most people in Christianity understand who Joni Erickson Tada is. Do you guys know who Joni Erickson Tada? If you don't know, she was a young girl, dove into a pool, became paralyzed.

And now she has lived her entire life in a wheelchair. She's actually written many books. And she has, when you spend time, and I've had the opportunity to meet with her and converse with her when I was a college kid, and you ask the question, how would someone survive that and live that? When you speak to her, there is no bitterness. She will tell you of her journey where she went to faith healer after faith healer after faith healer, looking to escape that. But it's once she accepted what God had for her, has she grown, and the glory of God has gone before her.

Elizabeth Elliot would be another one. We know Elizabeth Elliot. Her husband was a missionary down to South America, and the people killed him.

[18:24] You'd probably be pretty bitter with God, wouldn't you? How would we survive that? We think we're doing all these great, wonderful Christian things. My husband, Jim, he's such a wonderful man, and he's going to these people who've never heard of God.

The messages quit coming, then you get communicated. Your husband's dead along with his two friends. How could that be? It's almost a perfect recipe for misery, despair, and bitterness.

We look back at these people and say, if I had to face that, I wouldn't come out on top. I'm sure some of you know others like that.

I have a close friend. He lost his wife after 10 years of marriage to cancer with two young kids. He didn't think he was going to survive it.

And he would tell you now, and perhaps one day he will be willing to share his testimony with you. He is more stronger and knows more of God's word than just about anybody else I know.

[19:34] And before, he had no interest in theology to any depth. He just wanted to be a regular good guy soldier. But God has used him through that pain, and he's leaned on God like most people never imagine.

Some of you are like that. Check out Paul's words in Philippians 3.10. Looking back on that, that seems insane.

But we want to be transformed. We want to mature. Now, the flip side of this, I've met people who've suffered very sadly, very poorly.

They continue to ignore God who is there for them. They use it to escape, whether it be alcohol, find other relationships. Perhaps they have chosen to go another round and around.

And they never quite seem to get peace with God. You see, Paul is talking about a knowledge of God that has gone from your head and has penetrated your thick heart.

[21:03] It is living with Jesus at an experiential level. It's saying, I know what it is to live with God in the valleys of life.

Those who do not know God's word, the immature Christians, can't claim God's promise if they don't know God's promise.

Spiritual immature people live in the suffering of not trusting God because they never took the time to know him or lean on him. And for some, we watch them.

It's a lifelong process and God is trying to mature them. So the first mark of a mature believer is one who's been through the storm and has this experiential knowledge of God because they walked with him.

The second mark of a mature believer is Christlikeness. Take a look at verse 13. They are to mature manhood or womanhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

[22:18] You see, not only does the knowledge of God lead to an experience of God, the experience of God leads us to be more like Christ. The greatest lie that man ever believed was when the serpent came to Adam and Eve in the garden and said, Hey, take a bite.

You'll be more like God. What a lie. The tragedy and not only becoming more like Satan, they were already like God without sin, with a perfect relationship with God.

Yet it wasn't enough. The fact is we were created in God's image. One author says, The wonder of the gospel is that this original image, once lost through the fall, is now progressively restored to individuals as we are made like Christ within the church fellowship.

Galatians 5.22, we all know this. If your kids did some biblical memorization, it's one of the first verses you learn. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such things there is no law, and those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

[23 : 51] As we grow and mature, so does our collective witness. As we grow and mature, our prayer as elders is that we would fully manifest the full character of the Lord within this church.

You see, God's desire for you in Romans 8.29 is for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of God.

This is what Paul encourages so strongly here in Ephesians 4. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

Colossians 4.12 says that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Tell me that's not a great place to be, right? See, that's Paul's desire for us. 2 Corinthians 3.18 And we all with unveiled faces beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

[25 : 01] For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. We in a church look after one another. We care for one another. We speak into each other's lives because this is what we want for one another.

Amen? We do not want to see anybody left behind. We do not want to see anybody who's not fully transformed as Christ is calling us to.

As Christ took responsibilities for his disciples, so we do for the saints of this church.

So we see that mature believers have a knowledge of Christ, an experiential knowledge. We see mature believers are being transformed into Christ's likeness.

And the third characteristic of a mature believer is they know God's truth. They know God's truth.

Take a look at verse 14. And Paul uses this incredible contrast.

[26 : 05] So the reason that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Paul is doing this wonderful contrast between a mature believer and a child. And why is that such a powerful imagery? We know what children are like, right?

How many of you, when you're at home, you're talking with your wife, honey, we got some big budget decisions, right? Dave Regeer is really good at this one, right? Let's go talk to Jesse on this one, right?

Let's get his opinion to lean on. No one does that, right? No matter how good at math he is in grade three, you're not going to your child for advice on your budget or really anything of consequence.

So what are the characteristics of a child? One, lack of stability. Children have a lack of stability. They're easy to distract, right?

[27 : 15] That's why we throw them a toy that's got a lot of colors and makes a lot of noise. They go play with that until they hear some other thing and they go in and play with that as well.

Sadly, there's a lot of believers in the church are the same thing. They're kind of into this one part of understanding the Bible and all of a sudden they, oh, there's something else over there and then they kind of run over there and then they run over that.

I call that gadget theology. I believe that immature believers follow what's called gadget theology.

They're always looking for something new and bright under the sun that will somehow make it look easy.

It's kind of like on Facebook. I don't know. They're targeting me all the time with those ads, right?

Those pills, right? Just take a pill and you lose 30 pounds, right? You know? It's like my doctor's been talking to them or something, right?

And we can hook them on that, right? No fool believes that there's a pill you can take and all of a sudden you're losing 30 pounds. All right? The other characteristic of a child is they're easily deceived.

[28 : 22] Verse 14. They're carried away by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. The reality is children are easily deceived.

They're easy to play tricks on. For new believers, there is a heightened risk of deception by false teachers, by cults.

You know who tends to be the biggest deceiver of new believers? It's new believers that are like a month older than them. Right? They just have this little more knowledge and they teach them.

And I'm going to tell you something. This is easily the deepest pain that I have felt as a pastor in my 10 years of pastoring.

Last night, I took an extended period of time just walking away from this point. I love seeing new believers, new baptisms.

[29 : 29] When that happens, I get super sensitive. It's because it's like, I want to protect them, keep them in a cage, locked away, till we can mature them.

Because there's all sorts of sharks that are out there that are wanting to devour them. I have seen more new believers walk away over the dumbest things that we as mature believers in Christ would wonder what it is.

I actually wrote down some of them. All right? And none of these began with people who were ill-intentioned.

That's the crazy thing about this. They weren't malicious. They were honestly trying to follow the Lord. A few years ago, we had this young man got saved.

He had lived a life like he had done sometime in jail, just rough upbringing of time. He comes to Christ. We're seeing some growth. Then he gets all bent out of shape because we're using pews.

[30 : 39] Because apparently he found out that in first century, there was Druid practices using pews. And therefore, any church that had pews had to be of Satan.

How do you respond to that? Right? The scripture doesn't address it. But he's got this PDF download book from some guy. He doesn't know that Reddit and he's buying into it.

Because you're using the wrong Bible. I've read on the internet all the satanic influences that have happened a part of the ESV Bibles. Anybody ever had that comment?

Look at what your Bible is missing. And usually it happens with the King James Version only. And don't get me wrong, there's some people, King James Version is a great version.

It's just outdated by about 500 years. But that's okay. But people will tell you that it's actually sinful. There's cults that use the NIV or the ESV or the NASB and those are going to lead you to sin.

[31 : 44] The tragedy in all that is, I actually know the general editor of the NASB, this God is a godly, saintly man. And I actually know one of the general editors of the ESV and he's a wonderful pastor in Illinois.

But they read these books that say they're actually given to the occult. What do you say to that? Passover. People have approached me. We're supposed to do communion like the Jews.

It's supposed to be a Passover. And they want to do it every week. We want to have a big meal. Well, then you remind them, well, Passover, they only did once a year. So we're actually being a little bit more obedient with the regular, but you can't get in there.

The other thing is, musical instruments, they're evil, right? They didn't celebrate them in Jewishness, so we can't have that. Those drums from the devil. Or is it from the Devils?

I can't quite remember how that... But people get caught up in this. And why? It's because most of these people have not been disciplined properly.

[32 : 50] They accept what they read on the internet. They accept stories told by believers who are maybe five minutes older. And I'll be honest with you, as much as we laugh, I was weeping over this stuff yesterday.

Because I was going through, I don't know a single person when I went through, I don't know if they've ever repented. And they're now off somewhere. They're not involved in church. They've given up the faith.

And they really pursued something that they thought was going to bring them closer to Christ when in reality, it damned their souls.

We're to protect our children. That's why when we read Matthew 28, there is no commands in the Bible telling us to make Christians.

There's commands in the Bible telling us to make disciples. Which means teaching them everything that Christ taught us. Third element about children is what's called lack of proportion.

[34 : 03] And this kind of alludes to the other thing, right? They can't tell what's important and isn't important, right? He will fight me on pews, but he will be arrogant and insulting towards me and show now deference for authority.

They fight on the smallest matters and they neglect the weightier matters. Pride puffs up and they don't recognize it. I grew up in a church community where if you held a biblical prophecy conference, it would be packed out.

But if you held one on biblical sanctification and holiness, no one would be there. What's important and what isn't important? The fourth element of children is they only see themselves.

Like a child who goes into a room, he keeps all the toys to himself, they become self-centered. And it actually takes time to grow out of it. They can be impatient and demanding and judgmental.

Often they will grab onto hobby horses. You guys have all heard of Calvinism. R.C. Sproul, who obviously loves Calvinism, I think he said he would like to lock up every new Calvinist for 15 years or something like that because they just can't control themselves with it and they really don't have the experiential knowledge to know about it.

[35 : 31] Children fall into pride. That's why they can become hard to teach. And often they find themselves alert to pleasure and dead to duty.

That's why there's a lot of churches these days that is built simply upon entertainment rather than the word of God and actual discipleship. Why? Because some churches want to host juveniles and be juveniles as possible to entertain.

And the other aspect is sometimes children can't tell good friends from bad friends, right? When they really need to make an effort to hang out with some mature people.

It's interesting because at some churches when they don't involve themselves in discipleship adults become children. And when the church needs leadership they have the children in leadership.

And one of the greatest pains what became my greatest pleasure as I was doing this Bible study and there was this 85 year old man showed up and he was spoken as if he was a legend. And his reputation is he had served as an elder and a deacon in this church for 30, 40 years and I was kind of intimidated as he came into my Bible study.

[36 : 55] His legacy of giving was unbelievable. He just gave, gave he had a couple of businesses did really well but it was interesting as he sat down in my Bible study I found out he did not know really anything of the Bible.

He just came to church doing the moral thing and the sad reality is he was estranged from his children because he wasn't like he held to good things but did not understand and I mark one of the greatest parts of my ministry is when I saw this 85 year old man crying in the Bible study because he finally understood God's grace because this poor man had lived 85 years thinking he had to earn God's love which had already been fully given to him.

we want children to become adults. The fourth mark of a mature believer is they speak truth in love. It's pretty easy to speak truth right? We can be really mean about it. Just go to any theological Facebook discussion. They're horrible.

No points are made. People get mad. It just says simply verse 15 speaking the truth in love. Now what's really interesting is the translation of this.

[38 : 17] It actually means truthing it. It's not just talking about speaking the truth but it's dealing with one another and acting truthfully as well.

Another word is authentic. Paul's calling us to be authentic with one another. Now I hate that word authentic sometimes but the most important thing before I'm authentic with you guess who I have to be authentic with?

With who? God. Right? I have to be open honest. I have to be aware of the sin and misery of which I have come from and who God has made me now solely by his grace and mercy.

That humbles me. So that is why when we work with those who are children we remember that we were once children too right?

I was really stupid a lot of times growing up. I used to like to think I knew something about theology because I read a commentary. It's what 18 does for you right?

[39 : 28] Daiglin you're now a man you can be that guy right? But we need to be patient right? One of the best we had a new guy at church and he came and he wants to talk and he wants to engage and it's hard because I know he's like a child who's been looking at adults and he's trying to talk like them and he's mimicking them but his life is not adult like it's still childlike.

You see we're to be truth we're to be authentic with one another and we're to protect one another often people think love is just let it go let him be who he is but true love comes into the life of a child and says you're on a road to destruction in your marriage you're carrying forth an attitude that will lead to further anger will most likely lead to abuse ostracization of that your wife's love for you and it will most likely end in a divorce we are called to step into one another's lives to bring truth but in love to be gracious to be patient the reality is God did not give us knowledge understanding gifts and maturity to keep to ourselves we are called to give it away we are called to serve we're not called to stagnate we are called to edify and exhort not to be complacent and self-satisfied we are called to build up this body this imagery if I am a hand or a mouth or an arm or a leg

I'm to care for those other parts of my body for only am I are we one are we mature in Christ and the reality is without love we're nothing it was interesting just reading an article and it was talking about Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 and Jesus Christ is praying for us the church he's praying for unity but he's praying that we would be joyful that we would be holy truth mission unity and the last one he says is love and the author just says what happens if we took love out of that holiness would become legalism you know just wrote rules for us to follow joyfulness would turn into selfishness I would do what makes me happy not caring what you think truth would be truth for me you see there is this love that undergirds it all without it everything becomes cold and distorted now perhaps we've gone through these four characteristics of maturity and I'm hoping whether you see yourself as immature and mature that is a great place to be is to recognize who you are and where you are in your walk with Jesus Christ if I could give you a piece of advice is one enjoy being a child don't rush it some people think that they have got to go to eight bible studies a week and acquire as much knowledge as possible no you need to experience with people be discipled come under someone mature but walk with them don't rush you can't rush time but if you are on the right road demonstrating patience demonstrating that you are indeed immature look for those people who can speak into your life who show humility and graciousness to you do you want these characters do you want to be known as a mature believer take the time to read the beginning part of chapter four again because how to become a mature believer is not really what you think it is and that's what we're going to be talking about in the next couple of weeks if you're serious I hope you'll join us we're going to talk about it but it means ultimately to be a holy functioning part of a body of one which is called a church if you think maturity is gaining knowledge and being separate I'm going to tell you right here right now that's a recipe for immaturity God is calling us to something else and that's what we're going to be learning more next several weeks let's pray Thank you.