

“We Are Called to Mature”
Ephesians 4: 13-16
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¹³until 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, ¹⁴so 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 in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from 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.

Introduction

It is rare to see someone my age who is still able to play basketball. The key to being able to play basketball in my 50s, is that I am not athletic enough to get injured badly. This deficiency that I am blessed with allows me to develop other specific skills so that I could contribute to the team in other ways. For example, I have gained more knowledge of basketball as I’ve learned to observe the strengths and weaknesses of both my teammates and opponents.

This explains why good coaches are rarely the best player on the team. Compared to other players, coaches lack the athletic skills; therefore, it is necessary for coaches to really understand the game. The role of the best players on a team does not require them to learn skills outside of their physical strengths. Coaches’ skills involve using their head and analyzing the game and they continually develop these skills by observing many matches. This small role that coaches play becomes a valuable contribution to the team. Similarly, my lack of athleticism led me to contribute to the team by developing my observation skills. This ultimately has helped me become a better pastor.

The Church of Jesus Christ is like a team with so many factors. Individually we need to grow to contribute to any team or organization. You must be able to develop your skills as well as your character. Growth is hard and change is painful. But nothing is as painful as being stuck where you are and not growing and not contributing. My hope is that we be motivated to grow and mature in our spiritual lives as well as develop the necessary skills to be faithful to our different callings in life.

There are four principles of growth in this passage.

I. We need to grow in the knowledge of Christ - Maturity [13]

¹³until 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,

A. The unity of the faith

The first principle is maturity. We need to grow in the knowledge of Christ. This verse talks about the big picture of maturity. The first step is unity of the faith. Usually faith is talked about as the subjective belief. But in this verse, it is talking about the objective body of belief -the theological doctrine of belief. When the verse mentions “the faith,” it refers to the theological content of Christianity. The foundation of what we believe. To learn any subject or topic it takes foundational knowledge to accumulate deeper understanding. It’s true for physics or chemistry. You need to know the foundational knowledge in order to learn the rest. That’s why we need to have the unity of the faith.

In verse 13 it mentions the word “attain” which means to “arrive” or “to come to meet.” The verse is emphasizing that it takes time to understand doctrine. This starts with the understanding of the Word. As we slowly begin to understand the Word, it becomes a body of teaching. As we read the Bible, we will continuously grow in our knowledge of the doctrine and in our ability to make connections from different passages. What we learn from the Bible becomes the body of truth. It becomes conviction, understanding, and doctrine in your life. As you persistently read, the Bible will give you knowledge of your soul and of eternity. But it takes time. The unity of the faith starts with knowledge.

B. The knowledge of the Son of God

The knowledge the Bible teaches us about Jesus isn't just informational knowledge, it is also *experiential* knowledge. Some people think that learning about doctrine is inherently divisive. However, it is not divisive if you have doctrine that is heart knowledge – doctrine that is in faith that affects character. In verse 13, when it mentions “the faith,” it refers to experiential knowledge of Jesus obtained through day by day relationship.

1 Corinthians 12, 14 talks about the body of Christ and how we need to serve. But 1 Corinthians 13 talks about love – about our motive.

1 Corinthians 13:12 – *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

“Now I *know*” refers to *ginóskó* – knowledge. “then I shall *know* fully” is not referring to just normal knowledge, but deeper knowledge, *epiginóskó*. “Even as I have been *fully* known” – it's talking about that deep knowledge.

This same kind of deep knowledge that is talked about in 1 Corinthians 13 is what Paul is talking about in Ephesians. If you just have head knowledge, it doesn't change your character. You don't see the reality of what the Bible is talking about, you merely just understand the information. The theological information you learn has to become experiential knowledge in your heart. To the point we know Jesus and the reality of eternity. You need to personally know both the Word (doctrinal knowledge) and Jesus. It is through the Word, you are able to get to know Jesus.

One day a pastor teaching a theology class ten years ago had asked me, “What is proof that I'm teaching theology to people?” I replied, “When people are walking out of your class worshipping Jesus, you are teaching theology.” When it leads to worship, when it moves their heart in such a way it causes them to be motivated to live for Jesus and fall in love with Him. When the knowledge learned becomes experiential knowledge. Then, you are teaching theology in the way that it needs to be taught.

C. To mature manhood

Ephesians underlines doctrinal emphasis of the body of Christ, but Corinthians emphasizes motive. In the Ephesian church there were false teachers influencing their doctrine, so Paul emphasized correct doctrine. But in the Corinthian church, there were so many people serving in the church, but the motive was off, and they were offending other people.

1 Corinthians 13:11-12 – ¹¹*When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.* ¹²*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

In Ephesians, a child is one who is easily swayed. However, in Corinthians, a child is one with selfish motives. In 1 Corinthians 13:11-12, the phrase “when I became a man” means that you've learned to

fight your selfish desires and live for Jesus. When we see Jesus face to face, we will become like Jesus, who is *the* man. If we do not mature, we will be like children, selfish with no love in his heart. Additionally, like children we will be shallow and have no experiential knowledge of Christ in his head.

D. The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

In verse 13, the word “measure” is used. It means that Jesus Christ is our standard. Do not hate yourself, but also never be satisfied with yourself. Always be hungry and have an insatiable desire to grow.

In verse 13, the phrase “the fullness of Christ” is used. It means that we will limitlessly be provided for and we can grow limitlessly. Even in eternity, we will continue to grow into the full expression of the human and divine perfection of Jesus Christ.

In verse 13, the word “stature” is used in reference to a physical body. Paul is thinking about how the body of Christ can metaphorically picture the stature of Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:52 – And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

The verse says that Jesus increased in stature, meaning that He physically grew. When Jesus was born, He wasn't born with a beard, He had to grow up just like we do. The verse says Jesus also increased in wisdom. Through self-imposed limitation, Jesus chose to live only in His humanity despite having divinity. Jesus lived as a child and had to learn and grow as all children do. He grew in wisdom through studying the Bible, as we should.

Luke 2:46 – After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

The verse refers to a time where Jesus is at temple discussing the Bible with the priests while His parents were looking for Him. Despite having the full divine nature, Jesus lived within the limitations of human nature and was learning and growing in wisdom through studying the Bible. These limitations were self-imposed so that He could identify with us and understand us. All so that He could live and die for us, replace us on the cross, and carry all the sins of the world. All so that He could die on our behalf.

Another way to describe the purpose of his redemption and incarnation is that he became like us so that we can become like him. In becoming like Jesus, we are not only becoming like him in his human nature, but we are also becoming like him in his divine nature as well.

In 2 Peter 1:3-4, it says, “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature.*” As we pray, read, and relate with him, not only are we becoming like Jesus in his human nature, but also in his divine nature. Divine power is being poured into us in such a way that we're continuously becoming like him. Although we will never fully be like Jesus because he's so infinite, even in heaven, we will continue to grow to become like Jesus, partaking in his divine nature. We are experiencing the divine nature of Jesus Christ; we are receiving this incredible, indescribable part of the God-head.

Therefore, we have this availability. We need to grow. We need to be hungry to grow. We need to live like Jesus as he was on this earth. He prayed, he studied the Bible, so he could continuously grow in his human nature, while receiving power through his divine nature through prayer and the Word.

All the availability of the divine resources, which Ephesians talks about, the riches, the infinite fullness of God and Christ for us. We should never stop being hungry to grow, to be like Christ.

Roy T. Bennet said, *“Push your boundaries beyond the ordinary; be that ‘extra’ in extraordinary.”* Don’t live an ordinary life. His divine resources are available for us. Benjamin Franklin said, *“Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.”* Fight in your heart so that you’ll be a better man, a better woman. Better than you were yesterday, tomorrow more than today.

II. We need to grow in our discernment – Immaturity [14]

¹⁴so 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 in deceitful schemes.

We need to live for His glory, the praise of God, but like children, we are easily hindered by the influences of the world and other outside factors. Oftentimes we are so affected by the world to the point where it doesn’t give us growth or stability. Although we are called to resemble children in their humility and innocence, this verse is not talking about these positive attributes of children. Rather it talks about their ignorance and instability. The verse is not talking about a child’s purity, but their immaturity.

Children can be easily fooled. If you ask them to decide whether they want a quarter now, or a dollar tomorrow, they will always seem to choose the quarter. We are so fooled by a quarter of pleasure than a dollar of godliness. There is no self-control. They will forsake purpose for pleasure. In this verse, the focus seems to be of the mental and doctrinal influence of these factors because in Ephesians that was the context of the local church.

Four factors that will influence us negatively if we are immature:

A. Difficulties – circumstances

When difficulties happen, we ask, “Does God exist? Where is God? Is He angry at me? Is He bitter towards me?” We ask as if God has a bad character or a selfish motive when nothing we do can affect His goodness. Or we lower our faith or expectations of our faith in God.

B. Doctrine – thoughts

As circumstances change, we question, “Does God love me? Does God hate me? Is He good?” Our whole doctrine, what we believe about God, and what we know about God is affected by circumstances. When verse 14 states, *“carried about by every wind of doctrine,”* the doctrine mentioned refers to the body of believers. All kinds of things in the world may influence our beliefs. Ultimately influencing our love for God and the life that we ought to live. Throughout all these years, CFC has had to constantly check the doctrine that people are engraved with from the world.

For example, the doctrine of dating. Previously, we didn’t have any philosophy about dating, so people would date and break up according to the terms of society’s dating cultural standards. When that happens within a small group, it breaks up the small group as well. People would date without questioning whether there was anything wrong with how the world influenced dating life. Therefore, we had to develop a doctrine of dating from the Bible that we teach at dating seminars now.

Another example is the controversial doctrine around male and female roles. In the world, equality is emphasized. Although it should be emphasized, in the family, there are different roles because man is ordained to picture Christ and the woman is ordained to picture the body of Christ in their relationship. They are equal beings in the context of family, but different roles to picture the Gospel. We need to teach that.

Additionally, there is a doctrine concerning homosexuality. We need to teach that. It is important to talk about what the Bible discusses about homosexuality. We need to fight what the culture discusses because these doctrines are going to influence the next generation. At the same time, we need to love them and relate with them. Often, there is a clash because we need to fight the cultural war. We need to embrace them in our personal lives to engage with them, befriend them, and love them.

There are always controversial ideas and we need to teach that. Nowadays in the world, gender identity is more subjective than objective. But we believe that God, according to the Bible, has ordained us to have certain genders. He purposefully ordained those things so we can picture the differentness of the God-head.

We should always refer to the Bible to determine whether our beliefs are grounded in the Word or if our beliefs are affected by the doctrine of this world.

The values and views of CFC are usually from some teaching in the Bible. Therefore, I really encourage you to really learn first and explore other passages before you disagree with the values and views of CFC. When I refer to CFC values, I am not talking about the culture of CFC. CFC culture was made by certain individuals and may not be necessarily from the Bible. Even I personally disagree with some of the culture of CFC. I'm specifically talking about the values and views that CFC teaches from the Bible and reflection through the Scripture.

C. Deceivers – people

All these ideas come from people: *“by human cunning.”* Paul says that false teachers use *“cunning,”* trickery. From the Greek word *cunning*, the word *“cube”* comes out of it. It refers to cheating at dice play. I'm sure Paul took ships going to mission fields, and in the ships, there were sailors gaining money from other people by cheating while playing dice games. During the first century, there were false teachers in the church of Jesus Christ.

In the 21st century, they may or may not be in the church, but we are always listening to the voices through media and the internet. There are so many voices all over the world and we need to learn how to discern, because all those voices come from somebody and it comes from their doctrine, their beliefs. We need to learn how to discern through the Word.

D. Deceitful schemes – culture

“Craftiness” is attributed to Satan in 2 Corinthians 11:3. *“scheming,”* is the Greek word *methadoya*. The word *“method,”* comes out of it. Satan has a deliberate and careful plan to lead us away from God so that God would not be glorified, honored, loved, adored, and delighted.

Chapter 4 talks about personal interactions with some of the people that are being used by Satan through lies to deceive us. Ephesians 6:11-12 talks about the grand scheme of culture in the world. It says, *“¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*

I'm not saying that everything in the world is bad. I'm not saying to avoid listening to any music or watching any movies. But as you watch those things, you need to learn how to discern so that your thoughts, mind, heart will not be affected by the culture. We not only have to be careful of being affected by the culture, we also need to be *affecting* the culture. We need to create culture.

We can be affected through difficulties, our doctrine, our thinking process, in our self, in our thinking of our head and heart. Our motive is affected so we can operate in our sinful nature. Others can affect us. Time and culture can affect us. We need to learn how to discern. The only way to do that is to know the Word.

Psalm 1:3 – *He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

We are the tree rooted into the Word by the streams of water of God's Word. No matter what happens outside, we will yield fruit in season and bear fruit. Our leaf does not wither. We are consistent, we are stable. "*He prospers*": he can minister to other people. If you are in the Word, you can discern. You have substance - connected to the Word of God. Stability - bearing fruit of consistency. Success - causing others to grow. We will not be affected like a child, but we'll be like a man and woman of God - stable with substance and success, leading others to grow in the body of Christ.

William Booth, years ago said this, "*The chief danger that confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, heaven without hell.*" Much of this is true nowadays. People talk about salvation without change. There is such an accepting, forgiving culture, but without repentance. So much of this is so true and we need to be warned.

We need to grow against the grind. Sometimes we need to go against the flow. Growth and comfort do not coexist. To grow is always uncomfortable. But when things do not go our way, remember that every challenge, every adversity, contains within it, the seed of opportunity and growth. Let that seed grow.

III. We need to grow through truth in love - Method [15]

¹⁵*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

A. Public teaching

This passage is part of one long sentence in verses 11-16. Verses 11 and 12 talk about public teaching of the people with function, people with titles - spiritual leaders of the church selected by the church. Their job is to equip every member of the body of Christ, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ. It's in this thought that this passage comes in.

Ephesians 4:11-12 – ¹¹*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,* ¹²*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (41:01)*

Spiritual leaders can teach privately, but more so in public settings. They're spending time discipling people to equip the members.

B. Private sharing

Through public sharing, private sharing *has* to take place. That's what this verse is talking about. Ephesians 4:15, "*Rather, speaking the truth in love,*" is the truth that they have learned in such a way that it has blessed them. Now they can share that truth in love.

“Speaking the truth” in Greek is just “truth”. In Greek it’s not the noun, “truth,” but participle “truth.” I would describe the way the Greek used the word as “truthing”. It’s an English word I made up, but that’s what the Greek word is like. “Truthing” in love - using the truth to speak. *“Speaking the truth”* is really truthing in agape love. What we have received through the Word, now we truth, we speak to one another in agape love.

We should be quick to encourage and motivate each other to love in Christ and grow. But truth must be wedded to love. The combination means speaking truth in a loving matter. It is not truth in isolation. As if we only need to bombard people with facts and truth, but we also need to speak in truth in love.

There are “truth persons” and there are “love persons.” There are “truth churches” and “love churches.” You have one over the other. Sometimes “truth churches” uphold the Word, but conspicuously lack in love. These churches seem to enjoy arguing. Sometimes they’re fighting the cultural battle because they are emphasizing the cultural war, which we need. But then there are others that make mistakes by arguing for the sake of arguing, lacking love for others. “Love people” can make the opposite mistake. They are determined that all costs to maintain brotherly/sisterly love, but in order to do that they compromise. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it’s not softened by love, and love becomes weak if it’s not strengthened by truth. We need both, “truthing in love.” We need to apply that in small group. We need to start caring for each other yet still growing together in the body of Christ.

C. Examples of “truthing” in love

It can apply personally, in small group, families, church, etc.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 – ²⁴*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, (love) able to teach, patiently enduring evil, (truth and love) ²⁵correcting (truth) his opponents with gentleness (love). God may perhaps grant them repentance (God's love flows down through truth) leading to a knowledge of the truth, (truth) ²⁶and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

2 Timothy emphasizes spiritual leaders and the Word. See how this passage is weaved with truth and love. They’re all taking this in through one to one interactions. A mature, older person going to a younger person who is struggling spiritually; “truthing” in love.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – ¹⁶*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

God’s powerful breath is in the Word of God. That’s why it’s different than any other book. We can teach through the Word of God. We can point out wrongs through the Word of God. We can correct them through the Word of God. We can train them through the Word of God, so the man of God may be complete and equipped. All those words sound so harsh, so I had to look two chapters ahead.

2 Timothy 4:2 – *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

“Exhort” means to comfort and encourage. We need that balance. The Word of God can do that – “truthing” in love – so that people can grow. I was thinking about the system of CFC. How we do the right thing, where publicly the Word of God is taught on the pulpit, and with that, we use the sermon or the Word for the small group setting so “truthing” in love takes place. In “truthing” in love, as we

discuss, as we talk, as we relate, sometimes it's painful. But if you withhold truth because you don't want to cause other people pain, that's not true love. It's as unloving as leaving someone inside a house that is on fire because you didn't want to disrupt them from their sleep.

There will be pain as we grow together: pain from circumstances or from people. It's hard to grow without the pain of seeing our own depravity. We have to see our own hearts. We have to fight and grow. In that pain, see the opportunity and then grow. Let that seed grow through prayer and tears. Individually, we need to daily eat up the Word of God and grow up in God's Word. We need to fight our hearts. Eat up, grow up, and show up when people of God are together. Discuss God's Word together. Then, step up and take your place. Be equipped, enabled, "truthing" with one another in love, and be serving. Also learn to toughen up. When life is sweet, say, "Thank you" and celebrate. When life is bitter, say, "Thank you" and grow. Sometimes the path of pain is often the school of growth in a believer's life.

IV. We need to grow individually to make the whole stronger – Mature church [16]

¹⁶from 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.

These are five signs of a mature and healthy church:

A. Unity in the Word and doctrine

"From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint" implies their closeness. This same phrase is used in Ephesians 2:21 when it talks about the stones in the temple being together. They are useful to each other and they are together for a purpose. They are so tight together in the Word and in the Spirit, they are purposefully holding up the body of Christ.

B. Each equipped

"Which it is equipped," refers to each and every one of us. We have a healthy church at CFC. We have unity in the Word and doctrine. Each person is equipped with the Word of God in them so that the Word of God can come out of them to be able to edify, to encourage, to strengthen, and reproof. They are able to speak to unbelievers and encourage those who are discouraged.

C. All serving

Mouth speaking and hands serving. *"when each part is working properly"* is referring to when everybody is doing something in the body of Christ – we strengthen one another.

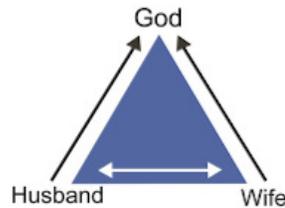
D. Being built as a whole

"Makes the body grow so that it builds." Somehow, as we are truthing with one another, we are growing as we are being equipped and being strengthened as a whole. If you are an older person in the church and you see a younger person serving in some way, it is working! That's how it ought to be in every ministry.

E. Atmosphere of love

"In love." We must improve on this more because although there's a lot of love in our church, everybody looks miserable. May the atmosphere of our church reflect the love present in our church.

Couples are always trying to get so close to one another, and that is necessary. But the relationship is not about you two falling in love. Marriage is a triangle because there is also Jesus. If you really want to get close together in an eternal way, you need to focus on getting closer to Jesus. If both of you are getting closer to Jesus, as a result, you both are getting close to one another.



May that be the foundation of your marriage, of your unity, of your small group, of our family.

Conclusion

Every so often, I talk to individuals in the church or alumni who say things like, “I feel so used by you, Pastor Min,” or “I felt so used by my leader, another member, or by the church.” Not everybody is like that, but some people do feel like that. I do try to understand and listen. It’s true that they may have done a lot of work without a show of appreciation or care from others for their efforts. Selfishly, I want to respond like a child would and ask, “What about me?” I selfishly recount the number of times and the thousands of hours I have given to meet people just to receive nothing in return. I never charge people. They pay for my meal, but oftentimes I end up paying because they forgot their wallet. If I charged people money to counsel them, I might have become an all-time millionaire by now. Then I repent for having these thoughts.

I also think about the number of members in our church that have sacrificed and given their time to serve. How many servants and co-servants have given their time, work, sacrificed to counsel people, make time for their members, made soup when members are sick, and made things to give to people. How many people in different ministries have volunteered their time? How many pastors?

Everybody sacrifices because we are a *team*. It’s a *team*, it’s a *family* in the body of Christ. We do everything together for one purpose: the glory of our God. I pray that, in all our hearts, we are *glad* to be used by others. Of course, wisdom is necessary. But I pray that we all will be so glad to be used by God and others. Our thinking should always be, “How can I serve more? God, use me more for Your glory.”

So, we need to eat up the Word of God, grow up to be like Christ, show up when the Word of God is preached, and show up when people of God gather together. Step up and take your place. Be equipped and be enabled, “truthing” in love, serving one another, but toughen up. Seek not only the sweetness of love but also the sting of the truth because we are called to mature for the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ together.