

Sermon on Ephesians 4:7-16 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Ephesians 4:7-16 “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. [8] Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”

[9] (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [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, [13] 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, [14] 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 in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] 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.” (ESV)

The enabling grace of Christ grows the church to maturity.

This week I have been pondering the effort that goes into raising children. From a book on the Anxious Generation, I have been evaluating if my kids have enough free play and as little social media as possible! Oh, and you have to feed them.

There is so much you have to do to raise kids to maturity, while most of us are in the thick of it, I am thankful that some of us have been to the mountain top!

Some of us would be delighted if they could just go to the toilet by themselves!

We train them up in the way they should go, equipping them to hopefully be capable of making wise decisions, to care for themselves, and others. To eventually bring up their own children.

Much is learned in the living, as they watch us, mimic us. But learning also happens through teaching, giving instruction, at different volumes! Learning also comes through discipline, learning consequences for actions.

The fear is that kids will never “launch.” It’s a reasonable apprehension in our age.

We know they are supposed to, that is living, growing, learning, owning, maturing... making for themselves.

The life of faith plays out in similar fashion - so much so that Paul, in describing the life of the church uses the metaphor of infancy, maturity, growing up, to describe the church.

But reaching maturity, as describe in our text, is for our good, and for the glory of Christ.

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A couple key things to see in Ephesians 4:7-16.

1) The goal of the church is maturity in Christ.

At Reservoir we are increasingly saying we are rescued and remade.

Rescued by Jesus - I was lost but now I am found. We were dead in our sin and disregard for God, but in mercy and great love he sent his son to save us. To give us acceptance, belonging, forgiveness.

We get all of this in the rescue of Jesus. But more comes...

We are also remade, into family, into his likeness, for the remaking of the world.

The gospel is more than merely rescue, it is new life, the promise of transformation, of renewal.

This being remade is in view in our text today.

v. 12b-13 “for building up the body of Christ, [13] 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,”

Paul uses a very long sentence to equate to “spiritual maturity.”

Unity in the faith (as we talk last week about being tether to the gospel, is what tethers us to one another). And of in the knowledge of the Son of God. That our unity would be rooted in knowing Jesus. To maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

“Faith” in this context refers to the objective content of what is believed (cf. v. 5). That is, believers should be in agreement concerning the apostolic teaching found in the Bible (Jude 3). Similarly, the “knowledge” of God’s Son refers to those truths about Jesus that are essential for all believers to affirm. Biblical unity must be founded on the objective truth-claims of Jesus. Then, God’s people should attain to “mature manhood.” Although this phrase could refer to individual believers, more likely it carries the corporate idea of the church (Eph. 2:15). God’s desire is for his people to attain to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” The goal for believers is to reach the maturity that Christ himself attained.

We become a grown man like he is a grown man. We want this. We want to be remade.

“The disciple of Christ desires above all else to be like him...” — Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

“spiritual maturity is simply Christlikeness. We are as mature as we are like Christ, and no more. He was the only fully mature man. His character was

complete, well balanced, and perfectly integrated. All His qualities and capacities were perfectly attuned to the will of His Father..." Oswald Chambers

This is what you are destined for, and this is what you are meant to pursue in the life of the church - in the unity we have.

What are the obstacles though to this spiritual maturity in the church?

Our approach to church... extra not priority. (Some of us were lamenting the reality that we can bristle at requirements for discipling our children in community, but have no problem with the demands of sport schedules).

See church as a convenience store of sorts. I pop in when I have time, get what I need, spiritual goods with a consumeristic mindset. A boost of spiritual energy, or a dose of guilt to strive a bit more.

Even the rugged individualism of our nation can be an obstacle... I will get mine, don't care what happens to everyone else. The list of things that get in the way could go on, keeping up appearances, refusal to go deep in things of theology or emotions, getting the gospel wrong and making it about performance and salvation only after we have given it our all.

"It is in disordered loves and empty fears that all disquiet of heart and distraction of mind have their origin." -Thomas à Kempis

All things that keep us as children, as Paul would describe it.

v. 14 "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 in deceitful schemes."

Four years ago now, we were in PV in the surf a little too deep for Iona and Ewen, I was holding them, making my way back in when we were tossed to and fro by two waves. I lost Ewen and Iona and I banged heads together... it was not pleasant.

Perfect picture of what happens, what Paul is describing, with a lack of maturity, we are prone to lose people to the waves. Whether the waves are Christian nationalism, calling evil good, self-righteousness, or being deflated emotionally when the solar eclipse didn't result in the rapture.

It is listening only to those that scratch the itching ears we have...

Children are prone to fads. They are drawn to the shiny. (Some of us are good at being childlike here). Maturity though has a steadiness, rootedness in truth. Anchored against the waves and winds.

It is in community we find this maturity.

“The supreme goal of the church is not evangelism, important and indispensable as that ministry is. The ultimate goal is stated by Paul when he wrote: “We proclaim him, teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ” (Col. 1:28, italics mine). God’s purpose is to produce disciples who reflect the perfect humanity of His Son, people who are able to react to the exigencies and trials of life in an adult and not in a childish manner—meeting adult situations with adult reactions. In short, God’s purpose is to produce people who fulfill their humanity and become what God designed for them.” Oswald Chambers

The church is meant for maturity. Anchored to Christ, growing to be like him.

2) Maturity comes through the enabling grace of Christ.

From unity in the bond of peace - the necessity of “one another” in the church, being tethered together - we hear this:

v. 7 “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

Each of us are given spiritual gifts for the maturing of the church.

“Grace” here means the ability to perform the task God has called us to. In Romans 12:6 he similarly explains, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”

Paul does not write that each one earns a spot by good behavior, but each is given a gift. Oh yes, there is effort here, but it is enabled by this grace.

And it really is for every member of the church, all the saints, given different gifts for the growth of the church in Christlikeness.

v. 11 “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,”

Jesus gives gifts - here (APEST) is a huge leadership text on gifts not offices in the church. These are foundational gifts from them the church is birthed, and I don't think any of these has expired, still given to the church for maturity. But the point is that they are given by Christ.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND: “This is a house set up and ordered by Jesus.... He does not do this in a casual manner. It is with the utmost discrimination and discretion: One is assigned to the rank of an apostle, one to the place of a prophet, others to look after the flock of Christ and to work at the divine instruction of others for those saints who are prepared to learn.”

Spiritual gifts are differing abilities given by the Holy Spirit to each believer to meet needs in such a way that it creates a community of people who are growing into the fullness of the character of Jesus Christ.

There are five lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible. There's actually one in Romans 12, there are two in 1 Corinthians 12, there's this one here in Ephesians 4, and there's one in 1 Peter 4. Every one of the lists is really quite different. It's pretty clear each one is not exhaustive; they're illustrative.

“There is no human need, spiritual, physical, psychological, or relational that doesn't have some spiritual gift that can address it... Spiritual gifts are the ability to address those kinds of needs. See, some spiritual gifts heal us when we're

wounded. Some spiritual gifts encourage us when we're downcast. Some spiritual gifts challenge us when we're lagging or correct us when we're going astray or love us when we're being rejected or just inform us where we're ignorant. There is no human need that doesn't have some spiritual gift that can address it." - Timothy J. Keller

This foundational list pairs with the spiritual gifts in the whole church to produce something great.

v. 12 "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,"

My work is to preach Christ and him crucified and release you to do the ministry you are gifted by the Spirit for. To keep us on track toward maturity in Christ.

Sometimes this is actually harder in a small church. Everyone is lifting - and some of us are having to do things that don't necessarily match our gifting because there is a need.

We get the appeal of the large church here, where it is easier to just be present, maybe even hide, and let the hirelings do ministry.

In some spaces we even desire for a top-down approach where the pastor decides which ministries are to be pursued, then we have our marching orders... just not how I am gifted!

[The theology of spiritual gifts gets you to expect a certain amount of chaos in a church, because a church that understands the theology of spiritual gifts realizes there will be ministry bubbling up all over the place from all sorts of places. There will always be a certain anarchy about a church if you really embrace the theology of spiritual gifts. A lot of churches don't want that.]

This is a text calling all of us, each one of us in the church, to step into the ministry we have been given grace for. Each church will have a different gift mix, and look different and have unique ministry. But everyone is a minister of the gospel in the church as Paul describes it.

This week I was asked about the staff of reservoir. I was like, “you are looking at it!” Which is vocationally true. But I also recounted the elders shepherding the church, the deacons serving the church, and that each member of the congregation is a minister of the gospel!

So if it's true, how do you figure out how you are gifted? You find someone with the gift of discernment and ask them! You evaluate your passions, your experience, willingness and follow after those. You pay attention to the things you pay attention to... what you think is missing from the church. You are likely gifted for it.

The point of the spiritual gift is not the technical perfection of the skill; it's whether or not it produces Christ-likeness in people.

“You have been crafted, and your unique abilities mean there are certain great things God wants you to do. Put it this way. Take your gifts, and everybody's gifts are different, along with your gender, your ethnicity, your experience in life. You put all those things together, and this means there are some people in this world who need to be reached, and you are the best person in the world to reach them because of who you are. There are some deeds that need to be done, some deeds that God wants to be done in this world, and because of who you are you are the very best person to do them. To understand your gifts and to exercise your gifts is to find your meaning and your mission in life.” - Timothy J. Keller

Whatever it might be, and everyone is gifted in some way for the maturity of the church, it is necessary for building up the church in love. Each part of the body doing its work.

Pulling each other away from the waves, the winds that distract, and speaking truth in love, together we grow, becoming a mature body of Christ. Smelling like him, acting like him, as he gives to us.

The whole purpose of all this ministry is to create Christ-likeness in one another.

“This carries the idea of not only speaking the truth but doing it. This is the medium through which growth is maximized. When there is “truthing in love,” when true lives are married to love, the Spirit is free to do his work, and the result is wonderful...“How does Biblical church growth come? (1) Through gifted leadership that in dependence upon the Holy Spirit teaches and lives out God’s Word. (2) Through discipleship in which God’s people are prepared for works of service and are using their gifts to the fullest, whatever their parts may be. (3) Through a progressive corporate maturity of God’s people, so all are riding high on the tide of one another’s lives. (4) Through truthing in love—transparent, honest, loving speech and lives. This is church growth!” - Hughes

[To each is given a gift. You are God’s workmanship. There are certain things you and only you alone can do, and if you in God’s providence are here, then the rest of us need you or you wouldn’t be here. God doesn’t waste people. He doesn’t waste assets like the rest of us do. Therefore, it is absolutely crucial that we embrace the theology of the spiritual gifts, that there be no unemployed or passive Christians.]

It’s worth the effort, because the King has come, and he give good gifts.

Paul inserts what to some might be a strange quote from Psalm 68.

“Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”

[9] (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)”

From the songs David sings for the Ark of the Covenant coming into Jerusalem, reminding the faithful that God goes before his people, Paul teaches us to read scripture Cristo-centrally. That the presence of God that was in a box has a better fulfillment, God himself, Jesus descending to take our place, live a life we

could never live, die a death we deserve, so his righteousness could be counted as ours. As the conquering, reigning king, he spoils his people with riches, gifts for gospel ministry that lead to the maturity of the church.

Receive first the gift of his rescue, of salvation and freedom from sin. Then lean into his remaking, into his enabling grace for the growth of the church to become in every respect the mature body of his who is the head, that is Christ.

The enabling grace of Christ grows the church to maturity.

“I heard Your voice from on high. "I am the food of the fully grown. Grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change Me into you, like the food of flesh eats. But you will be changed into Me.” – St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions

Ask for grace - for empowerment, for equipping.

Let 'er rip - Minister in love, preach Jesus, love the least, every part holding us together, moving together, to the fullness of Christ.

This text is a lot like a parent tossing the keys to a newly minted legal driver, “it’s yours now, take it for a spin!”

We have growing to do, and we will get there together, each one of us by the enabling grace of Christ.

1 John 3:2 “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (ESV)