

Are We Mature?

Ephesians 4:1-16

In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul is reminding the Ephesian Christian of who God says they are ... then in the last three chapters Paul tells them of what it looks like to be who God says they are.

The first thing Paul says about the life of a faithful follower of Christ is maturity.

... in the last part of chapter three Paul introduces this first topic.

¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:17-19)

Look at the word **“Comprehend.”** in verse 18 ... this word means to **wrestle, defeat, and subdue** ... not God, but ourselves.

Paul is talking about wrestling with ourselves ... wrestling the truth into our hearts through prayer and meditation.

Paul wants the reader to meditate on this truth until it becomes a part of us ...

In verse 19 the word **‘know’** means to **see clearly**.

... Paul wants us to meditate on the truth until we see something clearly ...

... what is it that Paul wants us to see clearly? *The love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...*

Why does Paul want us to see this “love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” clearly?

1. Comprehension Leads to Maturity

So, Paul uses 4 superlatives to describe this love and what he wants us to comprehend.

... **breadth, length, depth and height.**

- What does the **breadth of Christ's love** look like?

... I imagine that Paul is thinking along the lines of the glorious truth in Rev. 5:9-11 where John writes

... by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation ...numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, (Rev 5:9-11)

The **breadth of God's love** is so broad that it doesn't matter what kindred, tribe, tongue, nation you come from... everyone is included in the bandwidth of God's love.

- What does the **length of Christ's love** look like?

Again, I imagine that Paul is referring to the truth the writer of Hebrews mentions ...

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."... So, we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Heb 13:5-6)

The doctrine of eternal security is the doctrine of the length of God's love ... it is endless.

- When did God's love for you begin ... before the foundation of the world.
- When does it end?? NEVER

... It doesn't matter what you do or how far you go ... you cannot outrun the tenacious love of God ... it is endless.

- How **deep is Christ's love**? Here Paul is speaking of how far Jesus Christ was willing to go to for you.

Paul said it this way in his letter to the Philippian church.

...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men ... he humbled himself by becoming obedient to even death on the cross. (Phi 2:6-8)

Not only did Jesus come from heaven to earth ... he went all the way to death and hell ...

The Bible tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus sweat “great drops of blood” ... that is how great the stress and pressure was upon Jesus before going to the cross.

What kind of pressure did Jesus feel in the Garden of Gethsemane, that would make him sweat great drops of blood?

... can't you imagine the scene that night in Gethsemane?

“Father, I know we've been planning this since before time began ... but I'm scared ...

“Father, I'm giving my life for them, and they can't even stay awake and pray.”

“Father, let this cup pass from me”

... but then Jesus paused and said, *“No, I'll do it ... not my will but thine be done.”*

That is the depth of Christ's love for us.

And what is **the height of Christ's** love?

... I believe this is where God wants to take every one of us.

When you are in love you can't enjoy anything fully without the one you love being with you, experiencing it with you.

Movie ... event ... situation...

This is a poor example of the height of the love that Christ has for us.

Listen to what Jesus prays in John 17 Jesus prays, *the glory I had with you before the foundation of the world, I want them to have it to, I want them to be where I am. (John 17:5)*

Jesus loves us and He wants us to experience the same thing that has thrilled His heart throughout eternity.

Beginning to comprehend the *love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* is the beginning of Spiritual maturity.

Let's read the first 2 paragraphs of Ephesians 4 and because I want you to see 3 key truths related to spiritual maturity.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ 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. (Eph. 4:1-16)

2. The Life of the Trinity Is the Source of Maturity

Spiritual maturity is a growth process.

Paul writes v. 15 ... *we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*

What exactly does that mean? To understand Paul's meaning we have to look back at that little short verse 5.

“one Lord, one faith, one baptism”

That's the whole verse and the key word is “ONE”

- The word **Lord** points us to Jesus,
- ... the word **Faith** points us to God the Father (which we see in verse 6)
- ... and the word **Baptism** points us to the Holy Spirit (which we see in verse 3 *“the unity of the Spirit.”*)

This idea of unity ... or **ONENESS** through redemption, is a theme that Paul is constantly mentioning throughout this letter.

- (Ephesians 2:11-22) ***“one body:”*** We have all been reconciled to God through faith in Christ and have become part of the *same* body of Christ—the church.
- (Ephesians 1:13-14, 19-20) ***“one Spirit:”*** We have all been marked by the *same* Spirit as belonging to God, and they experience his *same* power at work in their lives.
- (Ephesians 1:5), ***“one hope:”*** We have all become adopted children of God and therefore look forward to the *same* inheritance.
- (Ephesians 1:9-10), ***“one Lord:”*** We have all heard the good news and have bowed their knee to the *same* King Jesus.
- (Ephesians 1:13; 2:1-10) ***“one faith:”*** They have all been given new life from God “through” the *same* gift of believing in Christ. that joins us to him and all the benefits of the salvation.
- (Ephesians 1:7) ***“one baptism:”*** They have all made the *same* public declaration of their allegiance to Christ, symbolizing that they have died with Christ, risen to new life.

Last week we talked about being “filled with the fullness of God” ... that is what this is about.

To be filled with the fullness of God **means** ... in a nutshell ... that if you are saved, you have the **life of the Trinity** living within you.

... this is why John the beloved would write, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world!”

Do you think that anything in the world can challenge or compare to this?

NO! ... God lives in you!

Now hold on to that truth because now we need to see the dynamics of this truth which Paul speaks about in verse 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.**”*

3. The **“Already but Not Yet”** Reality of Maturity

The first two words here are key to understanding the biblical truth of spiritual maturity.

- **UNTIL** ... means we have not yet attained.
- **WE** ... means that Paul is including himself in this statement.

In verse 11 Paul tells us that apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd teachers serve a purpose ...

... to **equip the saints** (all believers) for the work of the ministry

... and that is supposed to **continue until we ALL** “*attain to the unity of the faith...*”

God has given the church these gifts as resources [*apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd teachers*] to facilitate our growing into spiritually maturity.

Here is the contrast that Paul is showing to the reader...

When the life of the Trinity enters us in the new birth, we are spiritual babies ... that is true for every child of God.

To be an infant is a good thing, **but to stay one** is bad so here in Chapter 4 Paul gives us three characteristics of spiritual (and physical) babies.

- **Look at the exhortation in verse 2.**

In verse 2 Paul wants these Ephesian believers to be humble, gentle, patient ... and bearing one another's burdens with joy.

Now, it is important to understand that Paul wouldn't write this if they already were (**humble, gentle, patient**) ... he is writing this because they need to be.

If you've ever raised a child, you know that babies are not humble, gentle, patient ...

... in the life of a baby the world revolves around them.

... If they are hungry, or need their diapers changing **they cry ... and cry ... and cry harder** if they don't get what they want...

... I saw our precious babies get red and angry in the face ...

... and not just when they were teenagers ... they did that as babies

... babies are self-centered

... part of parenting is teaching children how not to be self-centered, so we tell them to share, we tell them not to fight, we teach them they can't always have their way.

The same is true of spiritual babies: they often get their feelings hurt ... they get upset when things don't go their way ...

... they can feel slighted even when they aren't.

... you can't give constructive criticism to spiritual babies because they take it personally ... because **babies** (actual and spiritual) **are self-centered**.

- **But in verse 14 Paul tells them he doesn't want them to continue to be children.**

... children are gullible ... they are undiscerning.

You know how you get a baby's attention? "Jingle keys ... flash some lights ... show them something sparkly ...

... and if you do, you'll get their attention for a minute or two.

There are a lot of ministries where this is the program they use for church growth ...

... flashing lights, show something sparkly ... do something spectacular

... get their attention for a few moments ...

In Luke 10 something very interesting happens.

... Jesus sends out the disciples and 70 others and sends them ahead of him into every city ... before he arrived—because the harvest was ready and plentiful.

... and when they came back, they were astounded "*Jesus, even the demons are subject to us in your name...*"

... Jesus kind of pushes back there in Luke 10:18

... he says, "I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning ... don't rejoice that you can command demons ... rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

... Jesus is saying, "grow up."

... don't be infatuated with the spectacular.

Adrian Rogers used to say, "*Miracles are good, but Jesus is better.*"

Babies are self-centered ... babies are undiscerning ...

- In verse 14 Paul doesn't want them to be "*tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine ...*"

Babies are unstable ... they go back and forth.

Paul actually writes *until we all attain ...* the use of the word "**until**" means we have not yet reached spiritual maturity and when he says "**we all**" he is saying that he is immature ... **WOW!**

In other words, we are simultaneously immature and maturing ...

In salvation, God's grace makes us a living baby ... that's how we all begin ... and that's when the process of maturing starts.

There are two truths you need to **take away from this.**

- **First...** Don't be shocked at the immaturity of other believers

One of the great truths you learn in relationships is this: "what people are today is not necessarily what they will be later" ...

Too many wonderful relationships have been lost simply because of something that happened in the past ...

... what people were in the past is not who they are today or even who they will be tomorrow.

... give people a step ... give them time to catch up ... treat people with grace.

... babies do break stuff but if you love them (even if there is sorrow over what is broken) you don't discard them.

- **Second take away is...** Do put up with spiritual immaturity in yourself.

Question:

Are you more humble, happier, more self-controlled and do you have more inner peace than you had a year ago?

Do you have the courage to ask someone who really knows you if the answer you give yourself is true or not?

The life of the Trinity lives within us ... we are called saints.

And yet ... we all begin this Christian life as spiritually immature

This is the **“Already but Not Yet”** Reality of Spiritual Maturity

4. Maturity Increases with Intention

Verses 15 and 16 describes what is supposed to be happening in a church ... in a true community of faith.

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. (Eph. 4:15-16)

Throughout these 16 verses Paul is defining maturity.

- It means togetherness with humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another's burdens (v.2)

- It means “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v.3)
- It means “common hope, common faith, common worship.” (v. 4-6)
- ... “unity of the faith (again) and ... “unity of the knowledge of Christ” (v.13)
- It means doctrinal and theological stability (v. 14)
- It means together, “speaking the truth in love.” (v.15)

Paul says all of this in the context of people living life together... not an isolated individual.

What this means is that spiritual maturity comes to us through deep involvement within a faith community ...

... a deep involvement where there is *intention and action* to increase in faith, love, and relationship.

- Paul is saying, you can't just “**drop into**” **church occasionally** ... and expect to grow.
- Paul is saying “you can't be **on the “outs” with people ... avoiding one another** ... and expect to grow.

Notice the practice of “*speaking the truth in love*” within the community of faith.

We will not grow if we are a faith community that has this balance of **both truth and love**.

Love without truth limits, stunts, and keeps us from knowing ourselves and reaching our full potential ... because we can't truly know ourselves unless someone outside of us tells us.

Example: Have you ever heard yourself sing on a recording? The first time is pretty shocking because you never hear yourself sing from the outside ... we hear ourselves from inside our own head.

I recently heard someone say that their husband had heavily invested in their singing career. The person with them responded, “Oh, I didn't know you could sing.” The first person replied, “Oh, apparently I can't.”

... everyone needs someone who loves them to give them honest objective feedback.

... I have often said, “the most embarrassing thing is to find out later (after the fact) that I should have been embarrassed.

Truth without love is harsh, unwanted, and hurtful ... you won't receive the truth if you don't believe the person giving it to you loves you.

The body of Christ, the local church, is where we learn to live life together and worship together ...

... and this wonderful faith community must have truth and love in balance so that the people of this community will be able to grow in maturity.

How is such a community possible in this world?

Paul gives us the answer in verse 7.

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

This kind of Community of Faith (church) is possible because of what Jesus had done for us.

... and the grace we receive is not limited ... it is based upon the measure of Christ's sacrificial gift.

This kind of Church is possible because of God's grace but it will not happen without intentional effort on our part.

When Jesus was on this earth He told us then that world was **dark and corrupt** and that those who were His followers needed to be **salt to hinder the corruption** and **light to dispel the darkness.**

I want to end today with a short video and then asking you a serious question.

First, the woman speaking in this video is **Libby Little** ... Libby and her husband Tom were medical missionaries to Afghanistan and in 2010 Tom was killed by the Taliban ...

... the very ones he had gone to help. Listen to Libby's words only a few short years after that horrible event.

SHOW VIDEO

Here is my question. Are we willing, as individuals and as a church, to do whatever it takes, not matter how corrupt or dark this world becomes ... to be SALT and LIGHT?