



GROWING UP!

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

Catalog No. 905
Ephesians 4:11-16
Twelfth Message
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March 14, 1993

Our text today, Ephesians 4:11-16, is one of three texts of Scripture that form the touchstone of our philosophy of ministry here at Peninsula Bible Church. These verses from Ephesians were the foundation of Ray Stedman's widely read book *Body Life* (Glendale: Regal, 1972), a work which revolutionized the church in our generation.

This text answers the frequently-asked question posed by new converts: "Now that I have become a Christian, how do I grow in Christ?" But the text is applicable to older Christians, too. It is easy for us to drift away from the things that keep us spiritually healthy.

We have already noted that the first three chapters of Ephesians describe how the work of Christ created a new community with no divisions between Jew and Greek. The apostle's first command, which we looked at last week, was that Christians walk worthy of that calling. We do this by maintaining that unity that Christ has already created. Believers should be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," says Paul.

The primary characteristic of the body of Christ, therefore, is that it is a unified organism.

In this text today we come to the second characteristic of the church: it is to be a growing body. One of the things that grieved the apostle was the fact that some Christians, especially those of the congregation in Corinth, had been believers for many years, but they were still babes in their thinking; they were not growing in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Today, therefore, we will look at three aspects of growth in the body: the foundations for growth, the goal of growth, and the means of growth.

I. Foundations for Growth (4:11-12)

And he gave some as apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints unto the work of service, unto the building up of the body of Christ;

We have already seen that, following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God through the Holy Spirit liberally distributed spiritual gifts to his church. He did this in the way that a victor distributes the spoils of war, and in the distribution established the foundation for his church. God did not begin with programs, but with a liberal distribution of gifts, thereby endowing gifted leaders to build his church.

Paul lists four of these offices, beginning with apostles.

(a) Gifted Leadership

The word "apostle" means "he who is sent." It carries with it the idea that the sent one possesses the authority of the one who sent him. In the NT, "apostle" is used to describe three different levels of apostleship. In the broadest sense, all Christians are "sent ones." All believers are sent into the world by Christ to be his representatives. But in a more limited sense, some of the apostles in the first century were sent out as the representatives of one church. Paul and Barnabas, for instance, were sent out from the church in Antioch to accomplish the task of planting new churches. When they returned to home base, they gave a report of their mission.

In its most restricted sense, the title "apostle" applied to that inner circle of the twelve apostles, to James, the Lord's brother, and to Paul. These men had one thing in common: all of them were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Lord. And they were personally authorized by Jesus to set forth the implications of his life, death and resurrection. From the hands of these apostles, therefore, came the New Testament. Of this inner circle, Paul confesses that he was the last. We learn this from his

own word to the Corinthians, "...then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles..." (1 Cor. 15:7-9).

And these men have no successors! This is critically important. The New Testament revelation is complete. The foundation has been laid. What remains is for every generation of Christians to master the text and to obey and pass on what the apostles have written.

In his book *Body Life*, Ray Stedman utilized the functioning of the human body as a metaphor to describe the work of these spiritual gifts with which the Lord has endowed his church. (I will be referring to Ray's method of illustrating the functioning of spiritual gifts as I go along.) Thus, the ministry of the apostles, according to Ray, can be likened to the functioning of the skeleton and the muscles of the human body: they give foundation, support and shape to the body of Christ.

Next, Paul refers to the prophets. In the OT, God raised up the office of prophet simultaneously with the office of king. Prophets were the king-makers, in effect. Samuel was the prophet who anointed Saul and David; later, Nathan anointed Solomon. Prophets were anointed both to appoint kings and to challenge them when they were wrong (as Nathan did when David sinned). They were men and women who stood in the counsel of God and received from him direct revelation. This is why we read phrases like "the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah" — or Micah, or Isaiah. Their ministry as God's spokesmen was to bring the nation back to the center of revealed truth. Their role became more important and their office more numerous as the nation drifted into apostasy.

John the Baptist was the last in line of these Old Testament prophets. It was he who anointed the last King, Jesus Christ. In his well known prophecy, Joel declared that this anointing of the last King would give birth to a new age. Then every Israelite would, in a sense, prophesy and become a spokesman for God:

**"And it will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions."** (Joel 2:28)

As we now know, this word of the prophet Joel was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

In the NT, all Christians are, in a broad sense, regarded as prophets. In Acts 2:17, the apostle Peter quoted these words of Joel in his sermon in Jerusalem: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh...[they] shall prophesy." All believers speak for God to a blind and darkened world. In a more restricted sense, in the first century there was an inner circle of prophets who received direct revelation. Paul links their office with that of the apostles in laying the foundation of the church: "...having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." (Eph 2:20). The church, therefore, was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And that foundation is never to be laid again.

In a secondary sense, however, the ministry of these men (and women) continues, although not in the sense that Christians receive direct revelation from God. God at times will lay upon an individual a burden for some aspect of revealed truth which the church has neglected. This ministry often is much broader in scope than the ministry of pastor-teacher. Francis Schaeffer, for instance, had a prophetic ministry to the church. Ray Stedman had a burden that the church had departed its foundations in the areas of spiritual gifts, the new covenant ministry and expository preaching. Charles Colson is another contemporary Christian

who comes to mind in this regard.

In *Body Life*, Ray Stedman likened the ministry of prophets to the work of the body's central nervous system: the prophets make the body sensitive to its Head.

Evangelists form the third category that Paul identifies in this text. Though all Christians as witnesses of Christ are under obligation to evangelize, some are especially gifted in making the gospel clear and relevant to non-believers. Evangelists have a passion for the lost. They hunger to reach the world with the gospel, often pioneering new ways and approaches to evangelism. Philip in the NT is an outstanding example. It was he who wanted to depart from Jerusalem and take the gospel to the Samaritans, and then later to the first African. And, of course, his wish was fulfilled. We can read about it in the book of Acts, that marvelous account of his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch, the official from the court of the queen of the Ethiopians. One of our own missionaries, Dudley Weiner, is a gifted evangelist. In his ministry in Paris, Dudley is always pioneering new things. Another of our missionaries, Jim Foster, who lives in Romania, evangelizes in a quieter way. He prefers to share the gospel on a one-on-one basis. Liz Hanneman, the wife of our pastor John Hanneman, belies her tiny frame in her boldness to witness to Christ to anyone who comes across her path. She is a wonder to watch!

Body Life likened this gift of evangelism to the work of the digestive system of the body: it takes food and turns it into new cells.

The gift of pastor-teacher comes next in Paul's list. The grammar of the Greek text indicates that the apostle used both words to refer to the same individual. "Pastor" refers to a shepherd who cares for his flock; "teacher" refers to his primary task of feeding the flock. This does not necessarily mean that everyone who has a teaching gift is a pastor. But it does mean that every pastor must be a teacher. How else is the flock to be fed?

Ray Stedman said this gift of pastor-teacher works like the cardiovascular system of the body: it cleanses, builds up and strengthens the body of Christ.

What do these foundational gifts have in common? They have what Christians need as a foundation upon which to grow, and that is the Scriptures. Each of these gifts expounds the truth in unique ways. The foundations for church growth, in other words, come not from programs, but from the Scriptures. This is why God has gifted men and women with special skills to unfold the Word to his church.

This text must have been especially meaningful to the Christians in Ephesus who were eking out an existence on limited financial resources. They had no political support, either. The licentious world in which they were called to live was dead set against everything they believed. So it was good news to them to learn that God was generous and he had everything in place for them to grow. Paul's question to them would be, "How is your diet? Are you eating regularly?" If they were not growing, it was because they were not eating.

We would do well to ask ourselves the same question this morning: How is our diet? Are we growing in Christ? Are we taking advantage of the opportunities to grow? Are we reading the Word and allowing it to cleanse us daily?

Paul's next point is that these office holders must have a clear understanding of their job description.

(b) Understanding the Proper Job Description

For the equipping of the saints unto the work of service, unto the building up of the body of Christ; (4:12)

Some take this to mean that the task of church leaders is to do three things: they must equip the saints, do the work of the ministry, and build up the body. This is the school of thought that says pastors should do all the work of the ministry, that they are responsible to meet everyone's needs, in other words. They must be available night and day for counseling, visitation of the sick, organizing committees, fund-raising, weddings, funerals, coaching, even maintenance of the church facilities. When a church functions this way, however, disaster is close at hand.

Moses is a good illustration in this regard. Because of his exalted po-

sition as leader of the nation during the Exodus, everyone who needed counseling came to him. But Jethro, his father-in-law, took him to task for responding to everyone who had a dispute. Here is what Jethro said, in Exodus 18:18, "What you are doing is not good, you will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone..." The solution was for Moses to quit being a full-time counselor and become instead a full-time teacher and discipler and allow the people whom he had trained to become the counselors (Moses would remain a part-time counselor for the most difficult cases). The apostle would agree. This was how God designed the church to function.

The pastor's job description is but *one* thing: he is to "equip the saints unto the work of service." "To equip" means "to restore something to its former conditions"; "to add what is lacking to something to make it complete, fit for use"; "to prepare something creatively." The verb is used of mending a torn fishing net, setting a broken bone, or restoring a broken brother. (The word is used almost exclusively in the Psalms (8:2; 11:4; 17:5; 18:33; 29:9; 40:6; 68:9,28; 74:16; 80:15; 89:37) to praise God for the beauty and order that he has established in his own creation.) "Equipping" here means being fitted out for a task, in relationship with others, so that, working together with the whole, nothing is lacking. Equipping, in other words, is a synonym for discipleship. If the pastor-teacher's job description is *equipping* the saints unto the work of the ministry therefore, the saint's job description is *doing* the work of the ministry. (Some of the saints, of course, go on to become pastors, elders and deacons, while others function in the service ministries.)

I will always be indebted to one man who faithfully carried out this ministry in my life. David Roper took me under his wing when I was 19 and a sophomore in college, and he set about the process of equipping me. I asked him to teach a Bible study in my fraternity, but he refused my request and offered instead to teach me so that I in turn could teach my fraternity. Dave never took me out of my setting as a student or an athlete to do something that had religious connotations. He helped me become God's man in those very settings so that I could function as a minister of the gospel. Meeting him changed my life.

So there we have the foundations for growth in the church: Gifted leaders who know their job description, who faithfully teach God's word, discipling others to do the work of the ministry.

What, then, is the goal of growth? Paul addresses this question in verses 13 and 14.

II. The Goal of Growth: Maturity (4:13-14)

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That no longer may we be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

(a) No Longer Children

Would you be surprised to learn that God has set goals for you? If you know and understand his goals, then you won't be taken by surprise when he designs your circumstances to accomplish them in your life. God wants us to grow up. He desires that we no longer be children, that we no longer be unstable, vulnerable, gullible, and indiscriminating.

The image that Paul uses here is of helpless children adrift in a tempest-tossed boat. Paul knew what it meant to be "driven to and fro" by the waves. William Hendricksen comments, "While he was writing this, the trip which had brought him to his present Roman imprisonment must have been before him in all its vivid terror." Children in the faith are easily misled by new, so-called doctrines. They are prone to be tossed about in the wind. They can't discern the evil motives that lie behind false doctrines. In the NT, the apostles invariably confronted the motives of the false teachers, not their doctrinal positions. It is because wrong doctrine always arises from impure motives. Paul described such teachers in Galatians in these words, "They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them" (Gal. 4:17).

When David Roper began his work of equipping me, one of my room-mates, who was an avid student of the Scriptures, had a visit from his uncle. This man told us that our Christianity lacked something that he called a "second blessing." If we would seek this, he said, we would receive another endowment of the Holy Spirit and we would speak in tongues and prophesy. My room-mate agreed to seek this blessing and pretty soon he began to speak in tongues. A few days later he spoke in tongues in my presence and prophesied concerning me. I couldn't sleep that night. I felt a sense of evil oppression in my room. Extremely agitated, next morning, I stormed over to David Roper's house. Dave was sitting in an old lawn chair in his back yard. He had just finished mowing his lawn and was sipping a glass of iced tea. As I poured out all my confusion, his face had a look of serenity and tranquillity. Then he picked up a Bible and clearly taught me from the Scriptures until my soul was composed. The mature man in Christ was teaching the child.

This is what God wants from his own — to "no longer be children, tossed here and there by waves..."

What, then, does maturity look like?

(b) Maturity

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the [experiential] knowledge of the Son of God...

Here Paul is referring to the deep faith that results from years of walking intimately with God.

Notice in the text that we will one day "attain to the unity of the faith." This is where we end up, not where we begin. I do not like to impose detailed doctrinal statements upon Christians in an effort to foster unity. This should be our goal, not our starting point. We attain the unity of the faith through years of faithfully walking with Jesus. Then, when someone asks you, for example, for your views on God's sovereignty and goodness, you will be able to answer from your years of study of the Scriptures.

Charlie Luce was an elder at PBC for many years. His outstanding love for Christ and his fellow men modeled for me the love of the apostle John. When Charlie's wife Roberta died a few years ago, he shared from Psalm 34, her favorite psalm, at her memorial service. He read these words,

**They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces shall never be ashamed.
This poor man cried and the Lord heard him;
And saved him out of all his troubles. (Psalm 34:5-6)**

Imagine the weight of these words coming from a man who had lost his wife after some 50 years of marriage. Roberta's face was radiant, he said, because God is sovereign and God is good. This is the kind of response that God wants from those who love him, a response borne out of years of experience and maturity.

And what is the measure of maturity? The text tells us: "to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Maturity is measured by nothing less than the character of Christ. And how do we get there? God designs life so that we might experience the things that Christ experienced, and in them experience his life. So you might ask yourself, "Are the experiences of Christ becoming part of my experience?"

Jesus was rejected by his family, yet he did not become bitter. He used his own rejection as a platform to gather up the outcasts of Israel.

Jesus was misunderstood by the leaders of Israel, yet he did not lobby for his own case. He went on being misunderstood, trusting that God would work out his purposes through this misunderstanding.

Jesus did what was right. He helped others and was scorned for his good deeds. Yet he did not compromise.

Jesus was wounded and betrayed by a close friend, yet he did not harden his heart but continued to remain vulnerable.

Jesus was physically and verbally abused until his body was a bloody, unrecognizable mass. Yet he knew that his stripes were not in vain; they would bring healing to the nations. (What an encouraging

word this is to victims of sexual abuse. Your stripes are not in vain.)

Finally, Jesus experienced the gripping grief of death, dying that others might live. This, too, will be our lot one day.

Ray Stedman went home to be with the Lord last year. His wife Elaine is one of my favorite people. She has a sweet, angelic-like spirit that I find most appealing. With Ray's home-going, she has now entered into a new phase of life: she is learning how to live without her husband. She told me that one of the most encouraging words shared with her came from a pastor who telephoned her and said he had three things to tell her. "First," said this man, "it will hurt. Don't pretend that it won't. Second, God will help. And third, read Psalm 71 every day." But surely, I thought to myself, she knows these things already. She already has suffered much in life. But then I remembered: she has not experienced suffering in this new dimension. God has created a new experience for her so that she will taste the life of Christ in a new way.

Isn't it encouraging to know that church growth has little to do with numbers or with feats of power? Rather, church growth is filling out the life of Christ in all our experiences. This may lead to numerical growth, of course, but numbers are not the true measure of church growth. Don't settle for anything less in your life than the full measure of Christ!

So in these verses we have the foundations and the goal of growth.

We come now to the means of growth.

III. The Means of Growth: Divine Speech (4:15-16)

But speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted together and held together through every supporting ligament, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Don't you find it intriguing that though the NT talks a lot about spiritual gifts, we are never told how to discover what our own gifts are or, when we find them, how to use them? So how do we discover our spiritual gifts? Here is a clue. Have you noticed that every passage that makes mention of spiritual gifts is immediately followed by a passage on love? We discover our gifts by loving people! So get involved. Start loving people. And the deepest expression of love is speech. Start talking to people and you will be using your gift, out of love. This is how the body grows — through the use of divine speech.

The vast majority of spiritual gifts are gifts of speech. This was the great gift that Jesus possessed. Isaiah wrote concerning him,

**The Lord God has given me the tongue of disciples [the learned],
That I might know how to answer the weary one with a word.
He awakens me morning by morning,
He opens my ear to listen as a disciple. (Isaiah 50:4)**

Jesus had the gift of so crafting a word that individuals came alive and felt cleansed and encouraged. At times, as was the case with the Samaritan woman, individuals to whom he spoke went on to change whole cities as a consequence.

In these verses, Paul lists five characteristics of this divine speech.

(a) Truth Bathed In Love

"Truthing in love..."

Love is the origin of good speech. As it fills you it liberates you to tell the truth. We are learning that victims of abuse hide the truth. They do not feel free to talk so they bury everything deep inside themselves, mistaking submission for silence. But then they make the startling realization that their refusal to speak results in their constructing their own tomb: they are the ones who die. Concealing the truth is not a loving thing. Love liberates the truth.

Over the past few months my wife and I have come to know a couple in our congregation, and we have been delighted to observe how well they communicate with each other. But the wife told me that it hasn't always been so. We learned that both she and her husband come from abused backgrounds. He, as a result, sought to control their home so

that she did not feel free to share her feelings. At last she sought counseling from a woman in our congregation, and love liberated her. She felt free to talk, so she confronted her husband and told him he needed help. He listened, and he too sought counseling. The result is that they began to communicate in the way that my wife and I found so appealing.

Husbands, can it be that you are not growing because you have created an atmosphere in your home in which your wives no longer feel free to speak to you? If your wife can't tell you the truth, who will? She is the one who loves you, the one who knows you best.

Divine speech, therefore, begins with truth that is bathed in love.

Secondly, Paul goes on to say that this speech does not promote self, it promotes Christ.

(b) Speech Which Promotes Christ

"...we may grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, Christ..."

When we speak, we promote Christ, with the result that people are encouraged to respond to him as their Head, not to us. The Galatian church rejected Paul and embraced another gospel, but he wrote these words to them, "You have done me no wrong. Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the *truth*?... My children, with whom I am again in labor until *Christ is formed in you*..." (Gal. 4:12,16,19). Paul told the Galatians the hard truth not to get them to respond to him, but to respond to Christ.

Third, when one is brought to lay hold of Christ as Head, the life that results serves to enhance commitments.

(c) Speech Which Enhances Commitments

"...from whom the whole body, being fitted together and held together ..."

Our purpose in directing people toward Christ is to bind them closer together, not to cause them to run away or create divisions. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, he uttered one of the most beautiful statements of Scripture. As he gazed upon his mother and his disciple John, he said, "Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother." The text continues, "From that hour the disciple took her into his own home" (John 19:27). The speech of Jesus binds together commitments like marriages, parent-children relationships, and relationships in the workplace.

There is a fourth thing.

(d) Speech Which Fosters Specialization

"...held together through every supporting ligament, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body..."

Notice that divine speech does not impose agendas upon people, but rather enhances commitments by allowing them to specialize. When every member is functioning properly (according to the proper working of each individual part), the body of Christ grows. In the human body, no organ is a superstar, as it were. It is the same in the body of Christ: each member has a unique and a limited function. The body grows in a healthy way when leaders allow the saints to develop according to gift-ness. This will happen naturally as people respond to the life of Christ as their Head. In the book of Acts, saints like Stephen and Philip use their gifts vigorously, without asking anyone's permission or having an organization instruct them on what to do.

Finally as the life of Christ is imparted from the head allowing everyone to function according to divine gift then says Paul the whole body builds itself up in love.

(e) The End of Divine Speech: Love

"...for the building of itself up in love."

Love is both the origin and the end of divine speech. What began as a private word, crafted in secret, now spreads out onto the public stage, strengthening the entire body, and the whole body is built up in love as a result.

The life of Jesus illustrates this so well. His custom-designed words, exchanged in secret, not only strengthened the hearers but went on to change whole cities through them (John 4); and later, the lives of millions throughout history who cherished the written record of the event. Well chosen, timely words spoken in secret will reverberate back onto the stage of history and strengthen many as a consequence. Love sown secretly in truth bears a rich harvest of love.

A number of years ago, a brother came to me privately to ask me how he could grow in Christ. He shared some struggles in his personal life that were impeding his spiritual growth. He asked me what I thought he should do with his struggles. When he said he had not shared these things with his wife, I advised him to go home and do so. She responded by loving him, not condemning him, and this acceptance liberated him to love others. He began to quietly minister behind the scenes with the love and grace of Christ. He even began to write beautiful poetry. Then tragically, he was diagnosed with leukemia. He had a bone marrow transplant, and he suffered through that painful radiation treatment that kills the bone marrow. Then infections set in, causing him to suffer more. Through 145 days and nights he suffered. When we visited him, we could not recognize him. But we heard him say, like Job, "Though he slay me, yet I will trust in him." In a moment of great beauty and tenderness we watched as his wife washed his feet. On August 23rd, 1991, Michael Buchanan died at the age of 41. His wife Hazel and her two boys moved to Sacramento just recently, and she wrote to me last week and enclosed a poem, a prayer to his Savior, which Michael had written several years before he died.

MAN OF PAIN

*In simple power
How deep the death
Deep in the earth
My Lord drew breath*

*The bloom of love
I stand in awe
He looks at me
And though ice caps thaw*

*Oh man of pain
What can I do
I long to show
That I love you*

*Around my neck
Embrace me now
In everlasting
Union bow.*

Michael's prayer was answered. Like Jesus, he grew up to become a mature man, a man of pain whose sufferings brought many to a knowledge of the simple but transcendent power of the love which blooms at the cross. This is what growing up is all about. Amen.

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