

Ephesians 4-11-16

The secret to maturity!

Ephesians 4:11–16 (ESV) — **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.

Sermon introduction:

Meet Gabe.

He is a 35-year-old male.

He still lives with his parents.

He does not cook, do laundry, or clean his room.

He spends most of the time playing Madden 21 or Halo on his Play Station.

He has no desire to be financially independent, get a job, get married, or have children. Why should he, when he can eat his parent's food, live in his parent's house, and spend his parent's money?

What is his problem? He is very immature!!! Said another way, he has failed to grow up. This has become such a huge problem in our culture that sociologists have a name for it.

It is called "Peter Pan" syndrome. Author Kay Hymowitz calls it the "child-man" syndrome. Others call it "delayed adolescence." Still others would say, "he is not adulting."

Sadly, some churches are just like Gabe. They never grow up or mature. In other words, they may have been around for a while, but they still act like children.

This brings us to Ephesians 4:11-16. These six verses describe the church of Jesus Christ. In these six verses the concepts of spiritual maturity/growth come up five times in six verses.

This raises a very important question. How does the church mature? Or how does it grow up? Is there a secret? What is the secret? The answer is Word ministry or Bible ministry. Word ministry, and Word ministry alone, causes the church to mature. This happens in at least three ways...

Word ministry equips the church

Word ministry protects the church

Word ministry grows the church

First, Word ministry equips the church

Who does Word ministry? Leaders!

Ephesians 4:11 (ESV) — 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

We covered these five gifts last week. I wanted to cover these verses again, to provide context for verses 14-16. Let me quickly review... the resurrected and victorious Christ gives the church gifted leaders.

Here is what I want us to see this week. The five gifts listed in 4:11 are all related to Word ministry. The office of deacon is conspicuously absent from this list. Why? The office of deacon does not revolve around Word ministry. The office of deacon revolves around service ministry.

All the other gifts listed revolve around Word ministry.

Apostles wrote the Word and preached the Word.

Prophets proclaimed the Word.

Evangelists proclaimed the Word.

Shepherd/Teachers also proclaim the Word.

Application:

Now, more than ever the church needs the benefit of Word ministry.

This is done primarily by the elders, those men who must be skilled in teaching (1 Tim. 3:2).

Besides working on godly character, Word ministry is the most important thing that an elder does.

When we identify future elders, this is one of the most important things we are looking for.

Does this man love the Bible, can he teach the Bible, and is he applying the Bible to his own life?

Besides personal godliness, the Word of God is the elders only tool.

If you aspire to the office of elder, you must love the Word of God!!!

Who does Word ministry? Leaders!

What is the purpose of Word ministry? Equipping the saints!

Ephesians 4:11–13 (ESV) — 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,

The shepherd/teachers do Word ministry to equip the saints for the work of ministry. In turn, the saints build up the body of Christ, but this all starts with Word ministry.

Word ministry is the engine that drives the local church towards maturity. The Word of God is where it all starts.

Like I said last week, the elders don't do all of the ministry, they equip the saints for ministry by teaching them the Word of God.

It is important to focus on what Paul is specifically saying in these verses. In one sense, it is not the preached Word that directly causes the church to mature. What causes the church to mature? It is a two-step process. The church matures as the elders preach the Word which equips the saints to do the work of ministry. If the preached Word does not equip the saints for the work of ministry, the church will remain immature.

Illustration:

Like I mentioned last week, many people view the church as a bus. Please indulge me as I elaborate on that metaphor.

On a bus...

The driver does all the work while the passengers enjoy the ride.

The passengers are often very proud of their bus.

They really appreciate good driving, and they can spot bad driving from a mile away.

They enjoy their reputation of being a well-driven bus with a well-respected bus driver.

Their bus driver even teaches other bus drivers the finer points of bus driving at big bus driver conferences around the country.

Many have been on the bus for years, yet they don't take the time to know the others who have recently gotten on the bus.

In the past some even helped to clean and maintain the bus, but now they just sit around and talk about the good old days.

They still like the idea of stopping to pick up new passengers, but they don't really think that picking up new passengers is their gift.

Some refuse to talk to others on the bus and insist on sitting in the same seat every time they ride.

A bus is not a helpful metaphor for the church. A much better metaphor is an orchestra.

In an orchestra everyone plays an important role. The conductor does not play any instruments, rather he equips the musicians to play their instruments together as one. When the members of the orchestra just sit there and do nothing they are useless to the orchestra.

Application:

Pastors should not be viewed as bus drivers; they should be viewed as orchestra conductors.

Pastors don't do all of the ministry; rather pastors equip the saints through Bible teaching to do the work of ministry.

This is why Word ministry is so important.

A church with "great preaching" that does not equip the saints for the work of ministry will remain immature.

The goal of Word ministry is not more knowledge. The goal of Word ministry is equipping the saints, which leads to life transformation, healed marriages, humility, love, and many other wonderful virtues.

Word Ministry takes many forms at GCF.

Please pray for the Word ministry of GCF.

Once the great *Charles Spurgeon* was asked, "what is the secret to your successful pulpit ministry?" He simply said, "my people pray for me."

Dutch pastors often say to their congregations, "If you pray me full, I will preach you full."

One scholar wrote,

“When, then, will the believers en masse understand that they are primarily responsible for the preaching which they hear, yes, more than their preachers? If every pastor knew and felt that the congregation was praying and that each member had prayed, that the congregation was supporting him, interceding for him... what preacher would not feel himself a new man and whose preaching would not be transformed? Once again, preaching the word is a function and activity of the Church, not the function and specialty of a man.” (Pierre Marcel)

Word ministry does more than equip the saints. This brings us to the second point.

First, Word ministry equips the church

Second, Word ministry protects the church

From what?

Word ministry protects the church from negative consequences!

Ephesians 4:14 (ESV) — 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.

“So that...” This verse is the result of Word ministry that equips the saints. The more Bible the saints get, the more protected the saints become.

In the first half of this verse, Paul describes what happens to churches that don’t get much Word ministry.

They are like small children... (v. 14a)

Little children are immature and vulnerable to danger. A few years ago, my family was at our annual family reunion at my sister’s house. There were roughly twenty of us sitting by the side of the pool. We were busy telling stories, laughing, and stuffing our faces full of food. In other words, we were very distracted. The whole weekend we had been vigilant about pool safety. Making sure we always knew where the small children were. But one of my boys, who was roughly two years old at the time, quietly crawled out of the house, and then crawled right behind our circle. He was heading straight for the pool. No one saw him. When he was about eight inches from the pool one of the cousins happened to look in that direction and saw him out of the corner of his eye. He jumped out of his chair, sprinted to the side of the pool, and snatched him just as he was sliding into the deep end of the pool. He literally saved his life.

Adults have the ability to see danger and avoid it. Most kids don’t. They run across busy streets, pet strange dogs, put keys in light sockets, and try to swim when they can’t.

Saints that don’t get constant exposure to faithful Word ministry are like immature kids. They are vulnerable to danger!

They are also like a boat on the raging sea... (v. 14b)

Saints that are not consistently exposed to faithful Word ministry are like a small rowboat on a raging sea, that is tossed to and fro on fifteen-foot swells. They are in deep trouble.

Both images in verse 14 provide a picture of the immature church, that is a church that has not been well cared for with solid Word ministry.

Word ministry protects the church from negative consequences! In addition...

Word ministry protects the church from negative influences!

Ephesians 4:14 (ESV) — 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.

When churches have faithful Word ministry, the saints are protected from negative influences. Like what?

They are protected from every wind of doctrine....

Sadly, there is always some strange, new, heretical doctrine threatening the orthodoxy of the church. Bottom line, if it is new it is heresy. In the last few decades the doctrines of theonomy, open theism, the New Perspective on Paul, the prosperity gospel, and new perspectives on gender and sexuality have threatened the orthodoxy of the church.

They are protected from human cunning...

Paul uses a phrase from the world of gambling for cheating at a card game with weighted dice. His point is that heretics use underhanded tactics to deliberately twist the truth. Think of the practitioners of the prosperity gospel and their 3-million-dollar homes. They are deliberately tricking vulnerable people with false doctrines to get their money.

They are protected from craftiness and deceitful schemes...

The same word for “craftiness” in 4:14 is used to describe the devil in 6:11. Therefore, this is probably a reference to Satan. He stands behind all false teaching. He loves to distort the truth, going all the way back to the garden of Eden.

Word ministry protects the church from negative influences.

Sadly, I have known many people over the years who have drifted away from the Word of God. As a result, they are unprotected.

They start to wonder, is Jesus really the only way to God?

Is it really just for God to crucify his own son on our place?

Are my friends who don't know Jesus really going to hell?

Is sex outside of marriage really wrong?

Is abortion really wrong?

Is homosexuality really wrong?

Does God really care what I watch on my computer?

Is the Bible really the Word of God?

These people need protection. Word ministry protects the church!!!

Illustration:

Several years ago, Spokane experienced severe winds. Many people lost trees. Trees fell through roofs. Trees fell on cars. Many people lost fences. The wind picked up our neighbor's trampoline and blew it over their six-foot-tall vinyl fence. It ended up safe and sound roughly 60 feet away.

The worst damage I saw was at Whitworth University. It was tragic!!! The windstorm blew down roughly 200 majestic pine trees were. I remember walking through the campus a day or two after the windstorm. It looked like a war zone. There were downed trees everywhere. Yet, some of the pine trees remained standing. What made the difference?

Being a curious person, I asked around. The working theory went like this, the trees that fell had shallow roots due to overwatering. The Pine trees that remained standing had deep roots, which protected them from being blown over.

When the winds of doctrine blow, what will keep us firmly rooted in place? What will keep us from falling over? What will protect us from apostasy??? Only one thing, spiritual roots that are deeply rooted in the Word of God.

Application:

When you are not grounded in the Word, you are vulnerable to false teaching.
We need to be protected.

What does this mean for you? Expose yourself to as much Word as possible.

Be at church every Sunday to hear the Word preached.

Come to Adult Sunday school when it starts up again.

Go to home group to apply the Word together.

Most importantly, commit to reading your Bible every day. When you fall off the wagon, which you will, climb back on!

If we are not immersing ourselves in the Word on a regular basis, we will have poor discernment, leaving ourselves unprotected.

When we are full of God's word, we can help the saints grow. Which brings us to the last point.

First, Word ministry equips the church

Second, Word ministry protects the church

Third, Word ministry grows the church

How???

We grow as we speak the Word in love!

Ephesians 4:15 (ESV) — 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

“Rather...” Instead of listening to every wind of doctrine, human cunning, and craftiness and deceitful schemes... we need to speak the truth in love to the other members of the body of Christ. What is the truth? The truth is clearly a reference to the truth of God's Word. In other words, instead of listening to false doctrine, speak the truth of God's Word to each other. This means that we need to know the truth of God's Word.

Verse 15 contains two inseparable ideas; truth and love. They must go together. How we say something is often just as important as what we say.

Some of us error on the side of truth. We speak the truth, but we are jerks. We are always on the lookout for heresy. When we spot it, we strike like a Cobra. We enjoy fighting for truth more than truth itself. Is this you? If so, you must repent.

Others error on the side of love. They are kind, but they have nothing to say. They want peace at all costs. They want deeds not creeds. They never want to offend anyone. Is this you? If so, you must repent.

Application:

We must speak the truth in love!!! Truth and love are equally important.

This must start with the truth of the gospel. All Word ministry must center on Jesus. Jesus is the sum and substance of the Word of God. It all points to him.

Speak the truth of his mercy, love, and grace.

Speak to each other of intercession.

Speak to each other of his promise to work all things for our good and his glory.

Speak to each other of his tenderness.

Speak to each other of his forgiveness.

Speak to each other of his return.

Speak to each other of his promise to make all things new!!!

We grow as we speak the Word in love!

We grow as we apply the Word in community!

Ephesians 4:15–16 (ESV) — 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.

As we speak the truth of Scripture to one other, motivated by love, we mature as a body, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ.

As we become more like Jesus Christ, we are motivated more and more to use our unique gifts to serve the body of Christ. When everyone uses their unique gifts, the whole body grows in love and maturity.

All of this is the fruit of speaking the Word in love to one another.

Illustration:

“Gene Mintz was my third grade Sunday school teacher in a large church in Tennessee. Not many men volunteered to be third grade Sunday School teachers when I was growing up. And I confess that I remember very little of Mr. Mintz’s classroom teaching. What I remember is that when my parents were struggling in their

marriage, making our lives awkward in the church, Mr. Mintz always greeted me—a little third grader from a troubled family—in the church hallways. Even when I went on to fourth grade, and fifth, and sixth, Mr. Mintz never forgot me. And when my family moved away when I was in seventh grade, Mr. Mintz sometimes still would write and ask how I was doing. I even got a letter or two when I was in college. And when I became president of Covenant Seminary, I got a letter from Gene Mintz that I will always cherish. “Bryan,” he wrote, “I have prayed for you all of these years.” . . . Because Gene Mintz did his part faithfully, I have been able to serve God and teach others to do the same.” (Chapell, 199-200)

Application:

Gene Mintz was a member of the body of Christ, who humbly used his gifts to serve others. He spoke the truth in love to a little boy. This helped a little boy persevere in the faith. Ultimately this little boy became a seminary president, who helped train thousands of pastors for Word ministry.

Word ministry equips the church.

Word ministry protects the church.

Word ministry grows the church.

Conclusion:

Gabe is 35 years old. He still lives at home with his parents and has no desire to move out. He is immature. He needs help!!!

What would you say to Gabe? Who knows?

Some churches are like Gabe. They are 35 years old, but they have not grown up. How do they grow up? Thankfully, the Bible does not leave us in the dark on this matter. Churches mature through the faithful execution of Word ministry.

Let's pray...