

Building the Church: Living Worthy by Doing the Work

Ephesians 4:7-16

Last week, we saw that living worthy of our calling begins with unity—working together to stay one in Christ. But unity is just the starting place.

Today, Paul moves us from staying together to growing together—from protecting the bond of peace to becoming a mature body of believers.

Here's what we need to keep in mind: **Spiritual maturity doesn't just happen because you're in the church.** It doesn't come with time, or attendance, or good intentions. Maturity requires the giving of yourself—your time, your attention, your heart, and your obedience.

It's no different than our physical bodies. If you want to lose weight, you change your diet. If you want to get stronger, lift weights and eat more protein. If you want to maintain your physique, you stay disciplined. Growth demands your investment—we understand that.

But when it comes to our spiritual life, we often expect maturity with as little work as possible. There's no growth without sacrifice.

And Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 4:12–13: Christ has given every gift necessary for the building up of His body—the question is whether we will give ourselves to the process.

I'm going to make several observations from the text. I want to make Jesus' command to pursue spiritual maturity so clear and compelling that you can't help but respond. In addition, our weekly devotional this week will focus entirely on spiritual maturity and what you can do to keep growing.

Observation #1: Every Believer Receives a Measured Gift from Christ (v. 7-10)

Paul declares, “To each one of us grace was given to the measure of Christ's gift.”

Such a truth would have been huge for the believers in Ephesus. Their city was saturated with spiritual competition—magical practices, power structures, ranking systems, and people constantly jockeying for position. And that mindset had a way of slipping into the church, like a bad odor from outside when your neighbor burns leaves, or the noise from a passing train during church service.

Some believers were tempted to elevate certain gifts and downplay others, almost like saying, “I'm more Christ-like because of the gifts I have, and you're less because you don't have what I have.”

Paul cuts straight through all of that. He tells them—if anyone has a gift, it's because Jesus gave it. Not because you earned it. Not because they're more spiritual. Not because they're more important. Whatever they have, they have because Christ measured it out to them.

Meaning—Christ is the source. Christ decided what you should have. Christ determined how much you should have. Christ distributed His gifts as He saw fit.

What Are These Gifts?

Which begs the question: What is this “grace”—these gifts—Paul’s talking about?

In simplest terms, Paul is talking about spiritual abilities—the capacities Christ gives to all His people through the Holy Spirit when they are reborn. Some teach. Some show mercy. Some lead. Some serve. Some give. Some encourage. Scripture gives fuller lists in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

But the point is simple: Christ distributes different gifts to different people so the church can function as one body ever maturing in the faith.

And not only that—no one person has all the gifts. God did that on purpose. A diverse body with diverse gifts so we would need each other, depend on each other, and work together. Just like Adam was designed to need Eve, and Eve was designed to help Adam, the church is designed to need its diversely gifted members. I need you and you need me. We need each other.

But while the gifts differ, the Head does not. There is one Leader. One Authority. One Shepherd over the entire church. Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church. So every gift finds its purpose under His rule, every ability finds its meaning under His mission, and every believer finds their role under His leadership.

Christ’s Authority to Give Gifts

Which sounds good. It makes sense. But it raises an important question: How do we know that Christ has the authority to give these gifts in the first place? Wasn’t He just a man who walked among us and was later martyred on a cross?

Jesus was so much more than a martyr. Listen to how Paul responds, reaching back to Psalm 68:18: “When He ascended on high, He took the captives captive; He gave gifts to the men.”

Paul is remembering King David returning to Jerusalem after defeating Israel’s enemies. David came back with the Ark, with the enemies he conquered, and with the spoils of war—and he distributed those spoils to his people. Because that’s what conquering kings do: they share the rewards of their victory.

Paul is saying, *That’s Jesus.*

But he doesn’t stop there. Verse 9 says: If He ascended, that means He first descended. Christ came down—He went as low as anyone could go. And after His resurrection, He ascended far above

all the heavens—the highest throne.

This points to His supremacy. No realm is outside His rule. He descended to walk with us; He ascended to reign over us. And now—through His Spirit—He fills all things. Yes, He fills the universe in general, but specifically in this text: **He fills His church with gifts.**

Just like your physical head sends signals and directions to your body, Christ fills His church with everything it needs.

In other words, Christ Himself measured out your gifts and gave them to you. All of your gifting comes from Jesus. Which means you lack nothing for the role God has called you to play. Christ has already given you everything you need. There's no need to supplement what He's given, no need to go searching for more. You're responsible to explore the gifts you already have, put them to use, and hone them.

That's our first observation: Jesus measured out to each and every one of us the gifts we need.

Observation #2: Jesus Gave Diverse Roles to Edify His Church (v. 11-12)

There are certain roles and certain people specifically designated by Jesus to build up His church. Beginning in verse 11 Paul says, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.”

Before we move on, let me quickly clear up something that can confuse people when they hear this list of roles—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

Foundational Roles: Apostles and Prophets

Paul is describing how Christ equips His church. Here's the simplest way to understand it: **Apostles and prophets were foundational.** Paul already told us in 2:20 that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Foundation. Singular. Laid once. Not repoured every generation.

A biblical apostle was someone who was personally chosen by Jesus, physically saw the resurrected Christ, was entrusted with supernatural authority, and helped lay the foundation of the early church. Nobody alive today fits that.

So when people today call themselves “apostles,” it's either a misunderstanding—and there's grace for that—or they're deceived and actively deceiving others. Either way, it's not what Paul means here.

Same with prophets. Before the New Testament was complete, God used prophets to speak His truth and help lay the foundation of the church. But once the revelation was complete and the

Scriptures were written, that foundational office ended. You only pour the foundation once.

Now—does God still raise up men and women with prophetic boldness, with prophetic conviction, who preach and proclaim Scripture with fire? Absolutely. But that’s not the same thing as being a foundational prophet, not the office Paul is referring to in Ephesians 4.

There’s a clear difference between the biblical offices Paul describes and the way people use those titles today.

Ongoing Roles: Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers

But when it comes to evangelists, pastors, and teachers—those are ongoing. These roles are still active. Still needed. Still Christ-given.

Evangelists are people wired by God to bring the gospel to the lost and push the message out of the church and into the world.

Pastors are shepherds who feed, protect, lead, and teach the church.

Teachers are both men and women who provide clarity, depth, and understanding so the church stays anchored in truth.

Different roles. Different functions. Different giftings. All intentionally given by Christ to build up His church and grow His people into spiritual maturity.

We see this in verse 12: “And He gave some to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ.”

Inverting Modern Church Culture

This inverts modern church culture that says the pastors, the leaders, the staff, the paid clergy—they’re the ones who do ministry. They preach. They teach. They visit the sick. They counsel. They serve. They lead. They evangelize. They do the work. And everyone else watches. Observes. Benefits. Consumes.

But Paul says, “Not in Christ’s church. Not here.”

Because Christ’s model is the exact opposite—**leaders equip, and the people minister**. Every believer. Every member. Every body part pulls their own ministerial weight.

The leaders’ job is not to do all the ministry; our job is to equip you to do ministry. The work of ministry belongs to the whole church. And shame on the church for teaching otherwise.

How are you going to have a strong, mission-focused, community-serving, Christ-exalting church when leaders don’t equip you to do the work of ministry? You can’t. What you’re left with is a

church full of adolescent Christians—believers who still need you to feed them, carry them, chase them, and hold their hand through every spiritual decision or challenge because they were never equipped to stand on their own two feet.

Real ministry happens when the church’s members start doing the work. That’s one of the reasons we started MLD (Men’s Leadership Development), NextGen Bible Lab, and various other discipleship groups. It’s the job of church leadership to equip you for the work of ministry.

Observation #3: Spiritual Maturity Is Measured by Christ’s Fullness (v. 13)

Which brings up more questions: How long do we need to be equipped? How much equipping is enough? Is there ever a point where we can say, “I’m good now—I’ve got what I need—I can just maintain”?

Verse 13 tells us that leaders can stop equipping and the church can stop pursuing spiritual maturity when they “all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.”

Because Jesus’ fullness is the measuring rod—the set standard. And because we’re fallible people who still wrestle with our flesh, still battling our old sin nature, we must conclude: **This work isn’t done in this lifetime.** It continues until the day we step into glory and Christ perfects what He started in us.

Now, that may not be what you want to hear, but it’s the truth you need to hear. Because let’s be honest—there’s nothing worse than thinking you’re spiritually stronger than you really are, and then life hits you in the mouth reminding you just how far you’ve still got to grow.

It’s like that ego lifter in the gym—the person who loads the bar with more weight than they can handle, glances around to make sure somebody’s watching, and five seconds later is pinned to the bench needing three people to rescue him. His pride wrote a check that his muscles couldn’t cash.

And you know what? Spiritual maturity works the same way. Just because you talk like you’re growing doesn’t mean you actually are.

Three Marks of Spiritual Maturity

That’s why Paul gives us a few things to consider when it comes to pursuing full maturity.

1. Unity of the Faith (v. 13) Paul says the church must grow “until we reach unity in the faith.” That word “reach” means arrival—like arriving at your final destination after a long flight. So unity in the faith isn’t accidental. It’s the destination Christ is driving His church toward.

“Unity in the faith” means unity in what we believe—sound doctrine, the core truths of the gospel, one Lord, one hope, one baptism, one body. When the truth is taught clearly and embraced, people who have nothing else in common start standing on the same foundation because they’re anchored to the same truth.

Let me paint the picture. Imagine we’re all on a construction site—building an actual church building. Different workers. Different trades. Different tools. Different skills. But when the foreman—Jesus—rolls out the blueprint and says, “This is what we’re building,” every trade submits to the same plan. The electrician doesn’t get creative. The framer doesn’t redraw the rooms. The roofer doesn’t improvise. Why? Because the building only gets built correctly when everyone follows one blueprint.

That’s unity of the faith: Different people—same truth. Different backgrounds—same authority. Different perspectives—same gospel.

And listen—this isn’t a one-time achievement. It’s an ongoing work. Why? Because we’re a diverse people with our own issues, blind spots, and remaining locked rooms in our hearts. We’re a mess in progress. And on top of that, Jesus is constantly adding new believers. Every new soul brings their own history, their own baggage, their own misunderstandings, their own heart issues.

So Christ is constantly pulling us together under His Word, aligning us with His truth, and shaping us into a people who actually live in unity of the faith. We’re a perpetual work in progress.

But the church is not merely united around doctrines—the church is united around a Person, the Person of Jesus.

2. Unity in the Knowledge of the Son of God (v. 13) Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus starts with a baseline of who He is. Every believer knows the essentials: Yes—He’s the second Person of the Trinity. Yes—He’s the Son of God. Yes—He’s the God-Man who took on flesh. Yes—He lived sinless. Yes—salvation comes through faith in Him alone. Yes—He died for our sins. Yes—He rose again and reigns in glory right now.

Amen to all of that—but that’s just the starting point. That’s the minimum you must believe to trust Christ in the first place.

But knowing Jesus—actually growing in the knowledge of the Son of God—that’s something entirely different. Knowing Jesus means you move beyond facts and into relationship. You move beyond information and into communion. You move from “I know about Him” to “I walk with Him, I depend on Him, I love Him.”

It means you keep learning who He is while at the same time developing a deeper hunger to know Him more, to walk with Him more, to experience Him more.

That's what Paul means when he says we grow in the knowledge of the Son of God—not head knowledge alone, but heart knowledge, relational knowledge, lived knowledge.

Unity in the faith locks in our doctrine. Unity in the knowledge of the Son locks in our devotion. You need both if you're going to grow into Christ's fullness.

3. The Payoff: No Longer Spiritual Children (v. 14) Paul says there's a payoff on the other side of our pursuit. Verse 14 shows us what happens when spiritual maturity becomes your lifestyle—not just a slogan:

“Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.”

Paul says when we grow toward Christ's fullness, we stop being spiritual children. Not “cute,” not “innocent”—he means easily influenced. Children believe whatever sounds good. They can be convinced, redirected, or tricked without even realizing it's happening.

And spiritually immature believers are no different. Paul says they're “tossed by the waves”—not steady, not rooted—constantly bombarded by Satan and cultural influencers. Then he says they're “blown around by every wind of teaching”—meaning if it sounds Christian, if it's packaged well, if it comes with a Bible verse in captions, if it comes from their favorite social influencer, they'll swallow it.

That's why maturity matters. Paul's describing people who are theologically fragile and spiritually gullible—not because they're unintelligent, but because they lack discernment.

The Danger of Immaturity

This is exactly why some Christians today fall for counterfeit Christian influencers who don't teach the Bible at all. A well-edited TikTok, a confident delivery, a cherry-picked verse, and suddenly people are reshaping their theology based on someone who has never opened a Bible in context a day in their life.

Or they hear, “God just wants you to be happy,” or “Follow your truth,” or “Jesus said don't judge,” and they just roll with it—because it sounds right even though it's completely unbiblical.

Paul calls that immaturity. He says false teachers use “human cunning” and “techniques of deceit.” In other words, they know exactly what they're doing. And if you're not anchored in truth, then you'll fall for their sweet-sounding lies just like Eve did in the garden.

Let me give you a real example: A believer hears someone online say, “You don't need the local church. Just have a relationship with Jesus on your own.” And because that message appeals to their hurt, their frustration, their fears, or their convenience, they accept it.

But that's not Scripture—that's deconstruction disguised as discipleship. My Bible says in Hebrews 10:25, "Do not forsake the assembly of the saints." In other words: go to church, be with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Maturity gives you what baby Christians lack: discernment. The ability to say, "That sounded good, but it wasn't God." And the courage to stand on God's Word even if it means standing alone.

That's why Paul pushes us toward spiritual maturity—so we don't get tossed around by every trend, every teacher, every feeling, and every voice that pretends to speak for God.

What Maturity Produces

So what happens when we actually live out everything Paul just laid out—the gifts Christ gave, the leadership He provides, the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son, and the maturity that keeps us anchored?

Paul says here's the result: "But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head—Christ."

In other words, when we walk this out, we don't stay deceived, unstable spiritual toddlers. We grow upward—into Christ Himself. Christ becomes the pattern. Christ becomes the goal. Christ becomes the measure. Christ becomes the model.

And in verse 16 Paul concludes by painting the picture: "From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part."

The Vision of a Mature Church

This is what a mature church looks like:

- **Christ is the Head**—everything flows from Him
- **The whole body is fitted and knit together**—no loose parts, no dead weight, no spectators
- **Every ligament**—that's every member—supports the rest
- **The body grows**—not in size only, but in strength, stability, depth, and love
- **Each part works properly**—every believer doing what Christ gifted them to do

This is not a church built on personalities. Not a church built on convenience. Not a church where 20% do 80% of the work.

This is a church where every believer knows their role, uses their gift, supports their brothers and sisters, and takes responsibility to grow spiritually.

This is what happens when Jesus is truly the Head and His people live worthy of their calling to grow spiritually. That's what maturity produces.

And that's exactly what Christ is calling this church to be.

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