

Introduction

Dawnae and I have loved being grandparents these last six months or so. Our hearts melt every time we see the little guy. The newness and the excitement of it remains as fresh as it was six months ago. To be fair, he hasn't yet told his mama, "No!" and he hasn't broken any house rules and such, but I suspect that won't really diminish the joy that comes with being grandparents.

The thing that has surprised me most about being a grandfather is the joy I experience from watching my own son be a father. I had no idea it was coming. I am utterly delighted to see his tenderness toward his son and his affection for him. I find myself thinking back to when Trey was a little guy and remembering the joys I experienced as a new dad.

With time and with retrospection I've begun to see the strength of the parallels between the family unit and the church. There's a significant reason Paul's most common metaphor for the church is that of the family unit. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are siblings with a vast age range between us, and I mean *spiritual* age, as much as I mean chronological age.

One of the most amazing parts of having a child is watching his or her development. The moment they truly interact with you intentionally is incredible. You know the child *is looking at you*. And then the coos. Oh, I love baby noises. As they grow and begin to get a bit more independent the trouble starts. I loved watching Trey learn to walk and learn to climb stairs, but then he wanted to do these things all by himself.

Many of you know I have a slight bent toward being task-oriented. Listen: stairs are a task to be accomplished, not a walk to be enjoyed. The goal of stairs is to get to the top or get to the bottom in as efficient a manner as possible, which means as *quickly* as possible. No one climbs stairs for fun. You don't stop after the third and say to yourself, "Oh, wow! What a lovely step that one was! I shall savor this one a bit longer! Hey, wife, come walk up this step. No, this one. Isn't it lovely?" No! If you're climbing stairs then there is a goal—a task to be accomplished—at the top of those stairs. The last thing you need is to be slowed down.

If you have a toddler who is able to climb stairs, the last thing you need is for an expression of independence. If you're in a hurry and your kiddo is walking with you, you pick him up and you carry him to the top of the stairs, and then you proceed with your task. I'll never forget the first time Mr. Independent showed up: "No! I do it, Daddy! *I do it!*" *I don't have time for you to do it.*

This is simply a part of a child's development. They need to learn to do things and so they insist on doing things themselves. Even when it's messy and inconvenient for everyone else. That's the essence of immaturity. Immaturity is, of course, okay! It is perfectly fine to be immature—when it's expected. When immaturity is unexpected you recognize something isn't right. If you hear someone say she has to change her child's diaper you

wouldn't think anything of it, but if the child is 12 you immediately recognize something isn't right. Immaturity in this area is not expected when a child is 12 years old.

Immaturity is simply that time between birth and becoming a fully-functioning adult. A child grows until adulthood, then growth stops while maturation continues. (I understand we often use the term "grow" metaphorically for maturation; I mean it in the sense of getting bigger.) We grow in order to mature, and when we are mature we do the things mature people do. To get there, however, requires a period of immaturity.

This morning we're going to look at what maturity in the church looks like and we'll see God's wisdom for how we get there. We're in Ephesians 4.

Eph 4:11 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.

Ephesians 4:11–14

Gifted Leaders

In verse 11 Paul lists a group of gifted people given to the church. We took a closer look at this verse last week and saw these are not five offices, or official roles in the church, but are five types of spiritually gifted people. Spiritual gifts are not given with qualifications. Paul has been clear: all believers are gifted by the Spirit of God and therefore as they participate in the life of the church, they use their giftedness in service to the Lord and to his church.

Paul first mentions apostles. These are not the Twelve or Paul, but men and women in the church gifted to plant churches. We often call them missionaries today. They are those who travel to other lands in order to establish new churches. Jonathan and Noella Kleis have traveled to Italy and learned a new language and culture and are actively planting a new church. While apostles preach the gospel, evangelists do so, too, but are a distinct group. They proclaim the gospel in the context of an established church. Rather than travel where the gospel has not reached, they are especially gifted to communicate the truth of God in Christ to unbelievers *locally*.

He mentions prophets. Prophets are simply those through whom God speaks. If you've ever had a conversation with someone and thought, "Oh, wow! That's a word from the Lord!", you've likely experienced a prophetic word. Prophecy *may* include predicting the future, but even with Old Testament prophets, predicting the future was a very small part of their message. Prophecy is mostly encouragement and exhortation, an urging toward faithfulness.

What is interesting about prophecy is it is a gift that seems to be available to all believers. Paul urged the believers in Corinth to pursue the gift of prophecy.

1 Cor 14:1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

1 Corinthians 14:1

To show that the gift of prophecy is not really about predicting the future, Paul follows up with this:

^{1 Cor 14:3} On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.
1 Corinthians 14:3

Here he's making a contrast with those who speak in tongues and indicates prophecy blesses the entire church. Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say the one who prophesies *tells people the future*. Prophecy is simply speaking a timely word on behalf of the Lord.

Paul also lists shepherds and teachers. Some argue this is really one group because Paul doesn't use an article with "teachers". He doesn't say the Lord has given the shepherds and *the* teachers, but "the shepherds and teachers". Without getting into a technical discussion of Greek grammar, he does seem to imply there is a connection between the two. The guy who wrote—literally—the book on Greek grammar explained it this way:

This evidence seems to suggest that the *ποιμένας* were a part of the *διδασκάλους* in Eph 4:11. ...Thus, Eph 4:11 seems to affirm that all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors.

Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics

All shepherds teach, but not all teachers shepherd. Teachers convey knowledge. This is an important function in the church, but if there were only teachers, then all a church would do is learn information. Shepherds also teach, but they help the church be transformed by that knowledge. Since another word for "shepherd" is pastor, it's important to again note these are not offices in the church but gifted people given to the church. New Testament scholar Harold Hoehner says this about "pastors" here.

Again, a caution must be made that the term refers to the use of the gift. Therefore, it describes a function with no hint of reference to an office.

Harold Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary

Paul lists these five specific groups of gifted people given to the church, but let us not forget that it is the *people* who are the gifts given to the church. The specific spiritual gifts, whether apostleship or prophecy or evangelism or shepherding or teaching, are simply the *kind* of gift a person is, but the persons given to the church are the true gifts.

To Equip the Saints

After listing these groups of gifted people given to the church, Paul explains their purpose: to equip the saints for the work of ministry. The word "equip" is interesting. It is used for the setting of broken bones. These gifted people set others in order. They prepare them for a purpose.

It's important to note here Paul's expectation that these five types of gifted people would be an ongoing reality in the life of the church. This is why the apostles and prophets *mentioned here* are not the same as the apostles and prophets mentioned in chapter 2 as

being foundational to the church. There he meant those in the office of apostle and the Old Testament prophets. The church of Jesus has been established and gifted people *continue* to be given to the church, because the church continues to need to be *set in order*.

These gifted individuals equip the saints, God's holy people—the church. They remain a present gift, for the church continues to need to be equipped. Because the church continues to grow and because every church consists of people at various stages of spiritual maturity, there remain parts of the body that must be “put in order”, like a broken bone. They must be “adjusted”, if you will. Notice what this equipping is for: the work of ministry.

Part of the reason I've spent so much time the last couple weeks focusing on these groups of people not being officers in the church is this declaration by Paul. These gifted people equip the church so that *the church* can do the work of ministry. The gifted people are not those who do the work of ministry. Officers in the church are not those who do the work of ministry. The work of ministry is performed *by the church*. Because these people are part of the church, they too do the work of ministry, but they do the work of ministry as part of the church, not as the *leaders* of the church responsible for the work of ministry.

As I've said before, here at New City the Council of Elders leads the ministry of the church. Our various deacons facilitate the ministry of the church. It is the church—you, me, her, him, them, etc.—that does the work of ministry. Paul adds another layer here: gifted people in the church equip the church for this work.

These gifted people given to the church certainly include elders and deacons, but they are not limited to elders and deacons. The work is done by all the people. Paul clarifies what this work entails: building up the body of Christ.

Because the church is an ever-growing and therefore ever-changing group of people and because the church will always be a blend of new and mature believers, this equipping is a necessary and ongoing reality, for the church remains in need of being built up. When we build up the church we are necessarily focused on the maturation of those in the church. This doesn't mean we end up navel-gazing.

Building up the church cannot mean ignoring the community around us. It does not obviate reaching out and serving our community. In fact, reaching out into our community is an effective part of building up the church! Think of what the church's mission is: we make disciples. Period. To do this we teach one another to obey the Lord Jesus, but that's the second part. The first part is baptizing new believers. You can only baptize new believers when there are new believers, which means an inherent part of disciple-making is outreach!

As new and young believers enter the church they need to be equipped. Remember “equipping” is like setting broken bones. Parts are out of place and disordered, so equipping means to help each other put our lives into the proper order. The goal of this is the work of ministry, and the work of ministry is building up the body of Christ. Do you see the cycle here? We reach out to bring in and we mature and develop those who are in so they are better equipped to reach out and bring in. This is discipleship.

The Unity of the Faith

In verse 13 Paul indicates the intended outcome of the work of ministry, of building up the body of Christ. The church will continue to be equipped to do the work of ministry “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”. That’s a lot of words, so let’s break it down.

The unity of the faith he mentions does not mean until we all trust Jesus. He doesn’t mean unity *in* faith, but the unity *of the* faith. This is the same faith he mentions in verse 5. There is one body and one Spirit and one hope. There is one Lord, *one faith*, one baptism. There is one God and Father of all. There the faith he mentions is the central teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must never forget that the Lord Jesus is the center of our faith. The Christian faith is Trinitarian. We believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are one God, not three. They are not *one Person*, but three distinct Persons who make up the one God. Don’t ask me how that works when $1 + 1 + 1$ equals three because $1 \times 1 \times 1$ equals 1.

We are Trinitarian. If we were not Trinitarian, we would not be Christian. We worship the Father and the Spirit yet the Father and the Spirit both glorify the Son so we are rightly called *Christians*. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed both center on the Lord Jesus. This is because we know the one God fully in Christ.

The unity of the faith, then, is found in our shared knowledge and experience of the Lord Jesus. The goal of building up the body of Christ is that we all become united in the faith, and this means a life united around the Lord Jesus. The knowledge of the Son of God is not mere facts about him, but the experiential knowledge that comes through faith and participation in the body of Christ.

Notice who is in view. This equipping happens until *we all* attain to the unity of the faith. Every one of us must attain to this unity. No one is excluded. This means we will not have attained to the unity of the faith until each one of us has attained it. Again we see this idea of following Jesus on our own completely destroyed. It is impossible to faithfully follow Jesus apart from his body. We will not arrive at the unity of the faith on our own, or if any single one of us fails to also arrive. We will only arrive at the fullness Paul means here *together*.

All followers of Christ, who are an ever-increasing number, must be brought to the unity of the faith through the building up of the body of Christ, which is the work of ministry performed by those equipped by gifted people given to the church. This is why our mission statement is so simple and straightforward: “Making disciples. Period.” That is simply a shorthand way to say what Paul is saying. Our job, our role, our function *as a church* is to build up the body of Christ and to impart the knowledge of the Son of God.

This knowledge is experiential. It is seen in maturity. Paul adds, “to mature manhood”. We are *the* body of Christ. We are *sons* of God in Christ, whether male or female. This maturity is seen in acting like a grown-up. He adds further clarification: “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”. We grow up to be Jesus-sized.

The outcome of the work of building up the body of Christ—making disciples—is maturity in Christ. It is the fullness of being just like Jesus. That’s what he means here. We are, corporately, the body of Christ here on earth. We must grow up into mature manhood, so we will be his body fully. We saw this last week in a bit more detail. God intends to grow us into full maturity, that we might be like Jesus. In Romans 8 Paul wrote, “For those whom [God] foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son”. God wants us to look like Jesus—in character and in holiness.

The outcome of our salvation is our complete and total transformation, which will result in being in the image of Christ. This is why salvation is not about a destination. Salvation is not about heaven versus hell. To be clear, those who trust in Christ will be with the Lord forever while those who do not trust in Christ will spend eternity, in the words of 1 Thessalonians, “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might”. Salvation is *primarily* about being transformed into the image of Jesus, and eternal life begins *now*.

This is the work of the church of Jesus Christ. To get us there, the Lord has given gifted people to his church to equip us for the work of making disciples, and the way in which we are equipped is we are maturing into spiritual adulthood. It is only in the resurrection this transformation will be complete. Our aim in this life is maturity.

You do not mature so that you can grow. Think of the human body. As it grows, it matures, but you do not reach physical maturity so that your body can continue to grow. That’s what a cancer cell does. Your body grows into maturity so that it can do the things a mature body is supposed to do. So it is with spiritual maturity. You grow into maturity so that you are able to do the things spiritually mature people are supposed to do, and that is to be like Christ.

No Longer Infants

Paul says Christ has gifted his church in such a way that brings about spiritual maturity in his people. He uses the imagery of mature manhood. That’s singular, by the way. We become one mature body of Christ—*there is one body*. We are individually parts of it. Next Sunday we’ll see how essential each part is, but the parts make up the whole. Unity is seen in our oneness—not in our uniformity, but oneness in the midst of our diversity. Maturity is seen in *unity*.

In verse 14 Paul turns to a negative outcome of maturity. It’s negative in the sense of being negated, not in the sense of being bad. The negative is a good thing here. He says we are maturing as the body of Christ, “so that we may no longer be children”. We need to hear the contrast. Maturity is seen in being a united, singular body of Christ that has grown into *mature manhood*. How, then, is immaturity seen? It is seen in being *children*. That word means “very young children”. We could translate it as *infants*.

The Lord has given gifts to his church to grow his church into a mature manhood—singular, and the result of this maturation is we are no longer infants—plural. If a mature church is a singular grown man, why is an immature church plural infants? Why wouldn’t it be a singular infant? Paul is hinting here that immaturity is seen in individualism, in the attempt to go-it-alone. Rugged individualism. “I do it...I do it...By myself...I do it... *You’re not the boss of me.*”

You can spot an immature Christian when you see someone refusing to be part of the whole. You see it in their refusal to be committed to the one body. You see it in their lack of commitment to others. You see it in the self-centered way they live their lives. As Jim pointed out a while back, two-year-olds only play by themselves, even as they play *around* others. Eventually, sometime after they turn three, they’ll begin to play *with* others—they begin maturing! Those who are spiritually immature participate to the degree they want to, regardless of what others need. They participate if they sense some personal gain or benefit,

regardless of how others may benefit simply from their presence. Some who are immature never make it to three spiritually.

Remember, the true spiritual gifts God gives are *people*. If you refuse to share yourself with others by participating in the life of the church, you are denying us a gift the Lord has given.

Paul equates spiritual immaturity with childishness. This is why gifted people are given to the church. The church must be equipped for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until each and every one of us has attained the unity of the faith and we have, together, grown into mature manhood and are no longer self-centered infants.

Another characteristic of spiritual immaturity is the lack of steadiness. Paul says we work so that we're no longer "tossed to and fro by the waves". Immaturity is seen in instability, whether a toddler cruising along the couch or taking that first step, or the young Christian whose life is tossed back and forth by the vagaries of human existence.

This doesn't mean those who are spiritually mature aren't pushed by the waves. It doesn't mean spiritually mature people aren't sometimes knocked down by the waves. It means the waves don't carry them away. They remain steadfast. Their lives, even when turned upside down by events they cannot control, are not truly threatened. They remain rooted. Firmly fixed. This is because the spiritually mature person is embedded in the body of Christ. *Together* we can withstand the waves. The spiritually immature person is not tethered properly to the body of Christ and so is carried away by the waves.

Paul specifies a particular danger: every wind of doctrine. He doesn't indicate any particular false teaching threatening the church in Ephesus, yet false teaching remains an ever-present danger. Mature manhood resists the winds of false doctrine, but not by you *the individual* being firm-footed. It is the body of Christ being immovable through the unity of the faith.

The mature church is also not compromised by human cunning or by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Whether these are lies directly from the enemy or lies from false teachers or the lies our culture tells itself every day, only those who are united in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God will be able to remain steadfast. This cannot happen alone and individually, for the Lord has given these gifts *to his church*, not to his *individuals*. You yourself receive a spiritual gift, but you receive it *on behalf of the church*, which is why *you* are the gift given to the church.

The craftiness in deceitful schemes and the human cunning refers to anything that distracts us from Christ. For some, the distraction is politics and they believe the most important issue in the world today is who gets letters mailed to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. For others the most important issue is theological precision on secondary matters. For still others the distraction is much more personal, whether their physical appearance or their personal financial security or non-stop drama. Some people live their lives as if they are a twenty-four-hour news channel, with non-stop arguments happening all the time. They live for this.

Whatever the source, anything that distracts you from the unity of the faith, which is life centered on the Lord Jesus, comes directly from craftiness in deceitful schemes. In the church these schemes are revealed and we're able to stand against them.

Application

It matters, then, how we build. God has given gifted people to the church to equip the church, for *building up the body of Christ*. How, then, do we build? We build with the right building materials.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul tells the Corinthians he had to address them as infants in Christ—with milk, not solid food. The reason they were infants is there was “jealousy and strife” among them, not unity in the faith. The opposite of spiritual maturity is self-centered infancy. Then he uses a building metaphor to describe his own work among them.

¹ Cor 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

1 Corinthians 3:10–15

Immediately after this he tells them they—the church in Corinth—are the temple of God where God’s Spirit dwells. Anyone who destroys God’s temple is in immediate danger for God loves his temple. His point is God’s temple is being built. He, in the office of apostle, laid the foundation for that temple and it is up to the whole church—each one of us!—to continue building on that temple. The warning is they must use the proper building materials. He uses examples of materials that do not burn—gold, silver, precious stones—and then lists building materials that readily burn. He’s not talking about salvation when he says they will be burned up. He’s talking about the service we give to the Lord in his church.

What is the right building material for the local church? What makes up the gold, silver, and precious stones in the building up of God’s temple? Paul told them in the previous chapter.

¹ Cor 2:1 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:1–2

In other words, Paul didn’t come with *himself*. He didn’t proclaim to them worldly wisdom and offer them sage advice. He preached the gospel of Jesus. He planted the church there with the goal of attaining the unity of the faith, and this unity of the faith centers in and on and around the Lord Jesus.

What unites us as a church is not our skin color. What unites us is not our music preferences. What unites us is not our education. What unites us is not our income levels or our investments. What unites us is not the cars we drive or the houses we live in. What

unites us is not the priorities we have for voting. What unites us is not the foods we eat. What unites us is not even a shared experience of living in twenty-first century America. What unites us is our one faith in the one Lord through one baptism.

Church, the wood, hay, and stubble that will be “burned up” on judgment day is anything we “contribute” that does not point others to the Lord Jesus. If you hear nothing else today, hear this: the only thing you and I have to offer each other is the Lord Jesus, and the way in which the Lord has enabled us to give one another the thing we need most is he has given us *each other*.

Do you see what these five groups of gifted people offer? Apostles travel around and plant churches. How? They proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Prophets speak on behalf of God and build up people in their faith. How? They proclaim God’s message to you, and God’s message is the gospel of Jesus. Evangelists proclaim the gospel locally. Shepherds and teachers continually guide God’s sheep to green grass and fresh water. How? They proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Each one of these groups points people to the same thing: the gospel of the Lord Jesus. They are those whose lives are centered on Jesus, who give themselves to the church in such a way that their lives are billboards proclaiming the Lord Jesus.

We saw last week that the aim of our salvation is we become more like Jesus. This happens as we see him more clearly. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3, as we behold his glory we are being transformed little by little. We are maturing, and we grow into maturity so that we can do the things spiritually mature people do. Spiritually mature people *look like Jesus*. They look like Jesus on Sunday morning. They look like Jesus when they’re at the office or in the factory. They look like Jesus when they’re grocery shopping. They look like Jesus when they’re folding laundry and changing diapers. They look like Jesus when they’re chatting with their neighbors. They look like Jesus when they’re walking their dog. They look like Jesus when they’re sitting on someone’s couch.

Too often we focus on spiritual gifts as a means of *doing* something, and then we assign tasks for people. We want them to get busy and do stuff. We train people in the church that they are there to do tasks, to check things off lists. So often doing stuff is building with wood, hay, and straw. If *doing stuff* is a replacement for being involved in each others’ lives, that work won’t last.

God gives gifted people to his church that his body might be built up and the only true building material is the Lord Jesus himself. We build so as to attain the unity of the faith, which is an existence centered in and on and around the Lord Jesus. It is a life that begins to look like him. This happens when you and I understand that *we are the spiritual gifts* given to the church. It *really* happens when we understand that by being in each other’s lives we are pointing one another to the Lord Jesus. That is the gift that keeps on giving.