

## EPHESIANS #60 4:13-15 3-3-13

### *Christian Maturity*

(Ephesians 4) What a privilege we share again this morning. We get to read and study together the precious word of our loving God. God forbid that we should ever take this for granted. Last week we spoke from Ephesians 4:12 about how God equips us for service in the church. Verse 11 says He gives us pastors and teachers. And its the calling of those teachers to equip the saints by teaching them the word of God. II Timothy 3:**16** *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.* That is what this next half hour together is all about. And what does the next verse say the goal of all this is? What does it say the Scriptures will do for us? **17** *so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.* So what equips the saint for service, for those good works to which God calls us? Is it the leaders of the church like I said last time? Or is it the Scriptures? Put 2 and 2 together and you will see, I think, that it is the leaders of the church, teaching the Scriptures, that enables us to grow and become the kind of servants that will bring honor to our Savior. That's what we are all about this morning. Thank God for this precious, precious time. Our study today comes from Ephesians 4:**11-16** *He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,* <sup>12</sup> *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* <sup>13</sup> *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 which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* <sup>14</sup> *As a result, we are no longer to 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;* <sup>15</sup> *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,* <sup>16</sup> *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* Whereas last week we looked at the expectation of service that is contained in this passage today we get to look at the expectation of something else. Our key word for today is maturity.® We are going to see from our text the call to maturity, the importance of maturity and the way to maturity.

The idea of maturity or growing is found in every verse we read from verse 12 through verse 16. There in verse 13 it says the goal of our service is what? The building up of Christ's body unto a mature man. The thought rolls on in 14 where we are called to quit acting like children and grow up! Isn't that what it says? **15ab** *speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up.* This is a frequent

admonition in the New Testament. The Lord expects that when we are born of the Spirit we begin a process of growth and development toward a certain completeness and maturity. Last time we saw Colossians 1:28 where Paul says his goal is to see every man complete or mature in Christ. II Peter 3:**18a** *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. I could give several more that, like our text, refer to this expectation of spiritual growth, as verse 13 of our text puts it **13** *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 which belongs to the fullness of Christ*. Paul argues that we, as the church, make up the fullness of Christ, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ and it is only fitting, proper, and right that a great Christ would have a mature bride and a mature body. Amen?

But what is the reality in the church as you've experienced it? Have you been terribly impressed with the maturity of believers that surround you? Not always, huh? Rather than a mature and beautiful lady, the bride of Christ sometimes seems like a bratty little, snotty nose girl. We see pettiness, willful ignorance and me-first, temper-tantrum kind of behaviors, which are an embarrassment to the name of Christ. Listen, little children are wonderful and cute. Little babies are truly adorable to behold, but when they stay little babies for too long they aren't cute anymore. Babies that don't grow lose their cuteness and become a source of great concern. You see, its okay to act like a baby for a while. But then you gotta grow up and when you don't it becomes very, very ugly. A friend gave me a book which contains some great quotes. It is called "From I Do to I Sue." And it is just a collection of quotes and facts about marriage and divorce. Some have that unique quality of being simultaneously sad and funny. For example, this story about the marriage of Hal Warden, age 12, to Wendy Chappell, age 14 in Nashville. Do you laugh or cry? The marriage only lasted one month. Wendy filed for divorce, saying of her 12 year old husband, quote, "he was acting like a 10 year old." That's incredible! Interestingly, Hal was ordered to pay Wendy \$30 a week to support their child, but in a case that went all the way to the Tennessee Supreme Court the amount was reduced to \$15 a week (the entire amount of Hal's allowance). By the way, Hal remarried at the age of 14. Amazing isn't it? I love that line: "he was acting like a 10 year old." That isn't good when you are 12. And it's even worse when you are 30. But you may find yourself looking at adults and thinking, "Why don't you grow up?!" And listen, its time the church in America did that. It's time to act like Christian men, and Christian women. Oh, but some will say, I prefer to be childlike and simple in my faith. No hard choices or hard thinking for me. Just give me Jesus and my TBN. That's the Trinity Broadcasting Network. Come on! You know the Bible does

say we are to be like children. It calls us to a childlike faith, but that is not the same as a childish faith. We are to be like children only in two ways. We are to be humble - like children in that we are small in our own eyes. Secondly, we are to emulate the trust of children, who are able to trust Mom and Dad in things they can't begin to understand. Don't stretch the childlike idea too far. We aren't supposed to be childlike in every way. I Corinthians 14:**20** *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.* In your thinking be mature! And that means you want to be doing some thinking! In Hebrews 5 the author reproves his readers because they have remained like children and haven't grown up. God doesn't applaud that;- he abhors that. He expects us and directs us to mature.

Consider something with me. My thoughts aren't fully developed on this issue, but I have been thinking about something I've never heard anyone else comment on. That is the difference between seeking revival and seeking maturity. Have you ever thought in those terms? Revival or maturity? Which do we go after? I grant that they aren't mutually exclusive, but they do seem to produce a difference in emphasis. Some churches are into teaching the Bible and doctrine and principles of Christian living. Others seem to be in a perpetual hunt for revival, for some great move of God that will sweep away carnality in a moment. My study of Scripture inclines me to the former, less dramatic approach. The New Testament doesn't speak much of revival but speaks constantly about maturity. I've come to think we can overemphasize revival at the expense of maturity. Listen, I have been in revivals. Real ones and I was blessed greatly by them. But, revivals come, revivals go. Maturity has a lasting quality about it that can be transferred from one generation to another. I think maturity should be a greater focus than it is. It seems to me that we all want to get revved up but God wants us to grow up. The first thing we encounter from our text is a call to maturity, to growth in Christ-likeness as we gain the mind of Christ.

Secondly, we need to talk about why this is so important. The importance of maturity. I've got five things for you to think about. Five things that maturity enables you to do - things kids can't do. Okay? #1 is that maturity enables you to work effectively. Mature people get a lot more done than babies. Agreed? I think so. That is why Paul puts this in here in Ephesians 4. He says, "Hey, if you want to get some works of service, done by the saints, you have to concern yourself with the maturity of the ones doing the service." Therefore, he says, "Grow up." If you are really going to contribute to the growth of the Lord's church you must first see to it that you yourself are maturing in Christ. Immature Christians can't grow a mature church. And, they also don't have a significant

impact on the larger society. R.C. Sproul writes: *It is when vast numbers of people approach maturity in their faith and sanctification that the structures of the world are seriously challenged and changed. If vast numbers of people are converted but remain infantile in their spiritual growth, little impact is made by them on society as a whole. Their faith tends to remain privatized and contained within the confines of mere religion.* I think our experience of the last twenty years supports that. To make a difference you must grow up and the faster you do that the greater will be your service. It's easy to remain a child - but it's selfish® Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted at age 16. He took his first pastorate at 18, and by the age of 20 he had the largest crowds in London coming to hear him preach. After reading his story when I was twenty my constant prayer became, "Lord, grow me up fast, so I won't waste time being a kid." You see, brethren, infants are a drain on our resources. They are. They compensate for that by being a big boost to morale and I pray we get some spiritual infants born around here. They are great for morale, but only if they are growing. Growing children of God is what we need and need to be, not wishy-washy unstable people but mature contributors to the growth of the body.

Secondly, maturity enables you to handle pain and disappointment. I can only imagine what it must be like to be a doctor or dentist and see some scared little kid coming in to see you. I'm told that I was a terror in the barber shop when I was a kid. I sit through haircuts pretty good now, but when I was little I was a pistol. I don't know why, but I couldn't handle it. You grow out of that. Most of you have. You get to where an inoculation doesn't terrify you. You can handle the pain. You can handle the disappointments life brings your way without falling to pieces like a child might. That is a fruit of maturity.

Thirdly, maturity enables you to reproduce. I won't get into a biology lesson here, but I think most of you understand my point. Now, this is not as absolute a rule in the spiritual world as it is in the physical. It is possible for an immature believer to lead others to life in Christ, but it is rare. It is the exception. Normally, evangelistic activity and fruit is found in conjunction with maturity. Where there is true spiritual growth we can expect to see some spiritual babies arising as a matter of course. Among the reasons I can think of why we have not seen a great harvest of souls in our day, in our society is simply that those in the church are too immature. Babies don't have babies. Spiritual reproduction, just as biological reproduction comes with maturity.

Fourthly, consider that maturity enables you to distinguish the important from the trivial. Children make the biggest deal over the smallest things. In the same book I quoted earlier I found

this word from Woody Allen. He says, “I had a rough marriage. My wife was an immature woman. I would be at home taking a bath and she would walk right in, whenever she felt like it, and sink my boats.” That’s the kind of things kids get furious about. Toy boats. They will cry over the tiniest things. And, of course, those same kind of little things make them ecstatic. They can’t distinguish the real value or weight of things and events. As you grow, your values mature. You come to cry at the right time, and rejoice at the right time. Looking at what makes you sad and mad and glad is an indicator of spiritual maturity.

Fifthly, maturity enables you to discern between truth and error. The fact is that kids are suckers. They don’t know enough to judge, so they are prone to be very gullible. You can’t take them to certain kinds of movies because they can’t distinguish the real from the imagined. I remember coming home one day and one of my young daughters was all excited because a message on the answering machine announced that we had won a trip to the Bahamas. It was some sales gimmick, but she didn’t have the equipment to recognize that. Maturity supplies us with discernment. Look at verse 14 *we are no longer to 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*. You see how he describes the immature person? Vulnerable to deceit. Easy prey for the crafty. Maturity is so important because it makes us alert to dangerous lies, the ones we hear from others and the ones we tell ourselves. Hebrews 5:14 *solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil*.

So now. We have seen the call to maturity and the importance of maturity. Now we look at the key to maturity. What is there that opens the door to this valuable treasure? In one word the answer is, “truth.” Truth! You see it in Ephesians 4. Verse 14 says not to be children. So what are we supposed to do? Verse 15 says we are to speak the truth. Verse 13 says we need to lay hold of the knowledge of the Son of God. Verse 11 says we are equipped by the ministry of those who teach us. All of this points us to one key to maturity: the truth. And this is confirmed all over the word of God. That passage in Hebrews 5 that we just read talks about how the readers were spiritual babies because they failed to feed on the truth. I Peter 2:2 *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation*. How do you grow? By feeding on and following the word of God. John 17:17 *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth*. Truth is the word. The word is truth. This is the God-appointed instrument for spiritual advancement, for growth in the children of God. Don’t think you are going to grow as a believer without growing in

knowledge. II Peter 3:18 says to grow in the grace and the knowledge of Christ. Every time Paul prays he asks God to give us more knowledge. Listen, I understand that knowledge alone is not sufficient to make you holy, but ignorance plus anything is guaranteed to keep you in the spiritual nursery. Nothing should be allowed to keep you from feeding your souls upon the truth of God. There is no substitute for truth. Exciting worship. Christian music. Neat fellowship. Emotional highs. These things may be nice, but if they keep you from feeding on the truth you will stunt your growth. And that's a promise. It is truth plus grace that over time will result in growth.

What do we need to avoid the problems of immaturity mentioned in verse 14 of our text? Look at this. Paul writes about some who are tossed about by every wind of doctrine. They are doctrinally unstable. They have no solid footing in the truth. They are susceptible to religious trends. You know what that's like? Adults do this too. But kids are especially influenced by the latest waves. Cabbage patch dolls, beanie babies, roller blades? You have those things lying around your house? Man, there was a time the kids had to have em. Seriously now, some churches are like this. Some believers. Winds of doctrine. It's like they joined the doctrine of the month club. Whatever is trendy. I thank God for the unchanging word to which we cling. And I tell ya. I appreciate too being a part of a theological heritage that has some history. A lot of the winds of doctrine that come over the airwaves on Christian TV, actually purport to be new findings. In reality they are rehashes of old heresies, but I am astonished that someone would actually make the claim that after 2000 years of the Christian church, they have discovered something new. That concerns me! But some people apparently think you are real spiritual if you invent your own doctrine. I think you are in deep trouble. As for me and my house, we are sticking with the old truths, the old paths, not the winds and waves. Those things are for children.

Sadly, that is where so many are. The ignorance in the American church is appalling. I am grieved when I meet dear people who have attended church for 10, 20, 40 years and know next to nothing about God. I spoke to a brother this week who is trying to offer spiritual leadership to some folks who have been in church all their lives. He was astonished to discover the extent of their ignorance. It was colossal. On the whole the church has failed miserably in her most important task - that of speaking, teaching the truth. The result has been predictable. Instead of growing up, instead of maturing, we have remained in spiritual infancy. Some find no problem with this as long as we can get folks to come to church somehow. In a lot of ways we have been successful at this. Church attendance is down a little bit but still relatively strong in our society, but we have a church

that is a mile wide and an inch deep. We aren't teaching folks anything but we are teaching a lot of them. It reminds me of Soren Kierkegaard's story of the tavern owner who sold beers for a penny less than he paid for them. He was asked how he could afford to do that and he said, "I make up for the low price by the big volume that I sell." Have we grown proud of the large number of immature, if not still-born, church members we have? Some of you, even now, are looking at your watch, wondering when this crazy preacher is going to finish. I've been going for almost a half-hour now and you can't take much more. At your last church the pastor only spoke for 15 minutes and he smiled a lot more than I do. May I suggest that may explain a whole lot. When all we offer are sermonettes all we get are Christianettes - miniature replicas of the real thing.

The key to maturity is the truth of God's word received with grace and lived with faith. That is why we are committed to teaching it around here - in our worship services and Sunday Schools, and ladies meetings and midweek groups. And in our youth group. I don't believe that every sermon of mine has to be the type that can spark revival. I'm after maturity. The editorial section of a newspaper printed a letter complaining about the sermons the writer heard each week in church. He figured that he had heard about 1500 sermons in his lifetime and could only remember two or three of them. He proposed that the sermon served no good purpose and should be discarded. One man wrote in response and said, "As near as I can tell, I have eaten nearly 55,000 meals in my fifty years on this planet. I can remember what I ate in only a few of them. I would give up eating but I have the distinct impression that I would soon be dead if I did." Maturity in the Spirit comes slowly as a rule, line upon line, precept upon precept. But it comes through His life-giving word. This is why, when we hired a youth pastor, we took an little different approach. We looked for someone who could teach the word. Some prefer that you hire an activities director who wants to get out and play tackle football with the boys and lead the group out mountain climbing. Some churches look for a cheerleader, but North Park wanted a teacher and for one simple reason. We want our kids to grow up. To quit being children, to mature and make a difference. We want the same thing for you and what is the key? The truth. In large, undiluted doses, taken consistently - with grace.

So, how then shall we live? The application today for some of you is to find a church home where the word of God is seriously taught. Al Martin says that if you find yourself in a church where the word is not honored by being studied then you need to saturate that church with your absence. Get to one where the pastor/teachers equip you by the word. And if you find that here, welcome aboard.

The application for all of us concerns our own feeding. When mealtimes roll around at the North Park diner, are you here? But another question is this: Have you learned how to feed yourself as well? There is only so much your church can do for you. If you want to really grow up, then start fixing your own spiritual meals. They should be, first, appropriate to where you are in your development. Some are ready for more of a meat diet. Others still need to get through the milk stage. You aren't quite ready for the Baconator yet, if you know what I mean. Seek help in knowing what's best for you. Your meals should, secondly, be balanced. Don't get caught up in studying only one aspect of the faith or only one part of the Bible. Enjoy a well-rounded diet. Thirdly, your meals should be of proper proportions. If you eat too much you have no time for digesting or exercising. The truth is meant to be lived as well as studied.

I remember a time when I ran into a member of our church in a restaurant. He was alone and was reading his Bible over his meal, which is exactly what you want to be doing when you run into your pastor in a restaurant. This brother shared with me that his new job puts him on the road a lot and he wanted some tips on how he could memorize Scripture while driving. He was also eager to listen to lots of recorded sermons. As I drove away from that encounter I found myself thinking that this man is probably going to be an elder in the Lord's church someday. You know why I thought that? Because I've read about and I've seen the power of the truth to turn us into mature men and mature women. May God help you to see it happen in your life. Let's pray.