

Spiritual Maturity

Long Beach Alliance Church January 4, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

And he gave... to equip the saints for the work of ministry... to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

~Ephesians 4:11a, 12a, 13b,c (ESV)

1) **The Important Movement From Being To Doing**

- A) The church in Ephesus was formed in the early 50's by the Apostle Paul with friends Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:19-23), who provided helpful instruction to Apollos, an influential and eloquent preacher in Ephesus (18:24-28). Paul returned to Ephesus in 54-55 AD, staying three years and distinguishing himself as a preacher of the Gospel (Acts 19-20).
- B) When Paul leaves Ephesus, he appoints young elder/pastor Timothy to lead the Ephesian church, strongly urging him to remain faithful in providing solid biblical teaching of doctrine, avoiding the indulgent cultural and religious distractions of Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3-11, 6:20-21).
- C) With this context in mind, Paul writes an "open letter" (sent to the influential Ephesian church, but also meant for distribution to other churches) to the Church while he is imprisoned in Rome (Ephesians 3:1, 4:1, 6:20; Acts 25:6-28:31), probably around 60-62 AD.
- D) The opening three chapters of Ephesians establish the distinctive identity of those who are "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:1-14). The final three chapters of Ephesians address those "in Christ" walking "in a manner worthy of the calling..." (4:1 and following).
- E) It is of the **utmost importance** to note the flow of the context from the inner-person (3:16-19) to the outer-person (4:1). If you miss the flow of the letter, it is easy to read chapters 4-6 as "to do" lists, instead of a natural out-flowing from the inner-being to the outer-person in the church (4:1-5:21), in the family (5:21-6:9), and for the individual (6:10-24).
- F) While Paul's primary purpose in Ephesians 1-3 is to help Christ-followers to grow into their "in Christ" Gospel identity (2:8-22), he also provides them with a profoundly direct example of living according to the Gospel despite the difficult circumstances of prison (3:1, 4:1, 13, 6:20).

2) Identity in Christ Eclipses Circumstances

- A) In each reference to his imprisonment (3:1, 4:1, 13. 6:20), Paul notes that his circumstances are submitted to his deeper identity in Christ. The most important aspect of Paul's life is Christ, not circumstances. This provides Paul a platform for speaking into walking in a manner worthy of the call of Christ (4:1), producing distinctive unity (4:2-6).
- B) If Paul can overcome his imprisonment chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard (Acts 28:16, 20, also Philippians 1:12-14), how much more can followers of Christ overcome their circumstances?!

3) Living Within God's Great Design For Gospel Expansion

- A) Paul articulates the active involvement of the Godhead (God, Christ, Holy Spirit) in the life experience of unity in the church (4:1-6). The distinctive unity of the church is an authentic public representation of Christ (cf. John 13:34-35), and is foundational for church function.
- B) The function of the church is made possible by the grace-gifts which Christ gives to the church through those He has saved (cf. Psalm 68:18; Ephesians 4:7-11). The diversity of gifted people in the church authentically flows from her unity in the Spirit (4:3-4).
- C) When a local church is unified (4:3-6, one Spirit, one Lord, one God), Christ gives spiritual leaders as gifts to the church for the equipping of God's people in "the work of ministry" with the goal of "building up the body of Christ" (4:12). Apostles, prophets, and evangelists cause numerical growth in spreading the Gospel. Prophets, Shepherd/ Teachers cause growth in spiritual depth in teaching the Gospel.
- D) The church in Ephesus appears to be suffering from a lack of unity, leading to a crippled church family resistant to serving in leadership for providing equipping and building of the church family (4:11-12).
- E) There is a connected relationship to which Paul is alerting us existing between 'walking worthy of our calling' (in Christ), an 'eager desire to be unified in peace' (in the Spirit), and our 'work in ministry building up our church family' (over, through, and in God).
- F) These truths are reflected in the purpose of leadership in the church producing "unity of the faith... knowledge of the Son of God" which produces organic spiritual growth leading to a "growing up" or "maturing" process leading to "the fullness of Christ" (4:13).
- G) Note the relationship between unity of the Spirit (4:3-4 & 13), walking worthily/maturity in Christ by faith & identity/baptism (4:1-2, 5 & 13), and the goal of the fullness of Christ, unified under God (4:6 (1:17-23, 2:22, 3:19 & 13). Walking worthy, in unity, for the fullness of His church!



Growth Group Guide



“spiritual maturity”
ephesians 4:11-14
january 4-9, 2015

Looking Up!

In what ways do we see God’s provision in these verses?

How can this knowledge empower our identity in Christ in eclipsing our circumstances?

Leaning In!

Why shouldn’t we look at this section of Ephesians as a list of to-do’s? How can we see these gifts and purposes as “who we are” rather than “what we should do”?

With this in mind, what is the purpose for the gifts mentioned in vs. 11?

Stepping Out!

In vs. 12, what does Paul mean by “building up the body of Christ”?

Respond!

In light of verses 13 & 14, what should our response be? Make a list of ways to respond to this glorious truth.

This Week!

Focus on God’s gifts and your role in His work and purpose. Ask your Father God for insight into the gifts He has given you and how you can further develop and use them.

This Week I’ll Pray For...

