

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ, Ephesians 4

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The title of my message today is Unity and Maturity in the Body of Christ and I'll be reading from Ephesians chapter four.

The six points to my message are:

Maturity checkpoint #1: Unity in the Church

Maturity checkpoint #2: Equipped for Ministry

Maturity checkpoint #3: Having Firm Beliefs

Maturity checkpoint #4: Speaking the Truth in Love

Maturity checkpoint #5: Putting on Christ

Maturity checkpoint #6: Bringing All Emotions Under Control

MATURITY CHECKPOINT #1: UNITY IN THE CHURCH

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:1-6 ¹*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.* ²*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* ³*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* ⁴*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;* ⁵*one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶*one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

EXPLANATION: As you know, the Book of Acts is the story of the new church. After Jesus ascended into heaven, Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit came to be the third and final revelation of God. In the books of Acts, we read how the church came together. What I've taught you in our studies is that the church was unified and full of joy.

ILLUSTATION: Unity is the perquisite of joy. In our church newsletter, I shared about a church which is far from unity and therefore far from joy. In that church, a

handful of people continue to push their agenda, hiring and firing staff, thinking they will eventually find the right staff to help them get big. This is their goal, getting big. Of course, they put it in spiritual terms, but really getting big is their goal. From my perspective, it's never going to happen because; one, this is not a noble goal and two, they aren't unified.

MATURITY CHECKPOINT #2: EQUIPPED FOR MINISTRY

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4: 7-13 ⁷ *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.* ⁸ *This is why it says:*

“When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹ *(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Verse seven references Psalm 68:18 which you should flag for further study.

EXPLANATION: The calling of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher are gifts from Christ to equip people for works of service, which means ministry.

Most don't see your church staff in the role of equipper. And because of this, most church staffs don't spend much time equipping. I cannot imagine what the church would look like if I and the staff spent our time equipping others for the work of the ministry. If I were to ask to you write a job description for me as pastor, it would include preaching, teaching, visiting, directing the staff, being responsible for the day-to-day administration of the staff and greater church, witnessing to others, developing new programs, evaluating ministries, troubleshooting, being a person of the community, leading and attending committee meetings, doing weddings, funerals, and counseling. I dare say “equipping” would never make the list.

Many view the pastoral staff as those who should do the entire ministry and they are surprised to learn each believer has been gifted by the Holy Spirit to perform a ministry. What is your personal ministry? Do you know?

What is the purpose of multiple ministries led by the laity who is equipped by the leaders? The answer is three-fold in verse thirteen: so the body of Christ might be built up; so believers will be unified in faith and knowledge of Jesus; so believers would mature.

Let's look at each of those:

- **Multiple ministries led by equipped laity will build up the body of Christ** – this is what I called “shared ministry.” It should be the goal of pastors and pastoral staff to duplicate themselves over and over so others can do the work of the ministry. And then those lay leaders should train other lay leaders so the work would expand. If this simple model happened, the Gospel would spread quickly and the church would grow quickly. The only problem we'd have to deal with would be where to put all the people.
- **Next, multiple ministries led by equipped laity will unify believers in faith and knowledge of Jesus** – When believers are united in faith, the church can do anything. Unified believers will be unified in decisions. Unified believers will enjoy each other's company. Unified believers will be focused on ministry, because they will be unified in faith! Also, the scripture says believers will be unified in knowledge.
- **Also, multiple ministries led by equipped laity lead to maturity** – I trust we are all maturing as we should be, but I'm afraid many believers never mature. Have you ever heard someone say they didn't like a pastor's sermon by stating, “I'm not being fed?” That's really a funny statement coming from an adult and a sign of immaturity. Imagine an adult sitting around a table not eating because no one is feeding him, even though the adult has no handicap whatsoever. If you are an adult, feed yourself.

APPLICATION: If you are rating a pastor's preaching skill as the *sole* criteria of what church you will join, you are basically saying you want to sit at the table in a

highchair while the pastor takes the baby spoon, dips it into a jar of baby food, and puts it in your mouth...and possibly entertain you a bit so you will eat.

MATURITY CHECKPOINT #3: HAVING FIRM BELIEFS

Paul continued explaining what he meant by maturity:

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4: 14 ¹⁴ *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.*

EXPLANATION: In Paul's day and in Ephesus, as well as nearly every other place he visited, there was a different religion on every corner. There were perversions of the Judaism and perversions of Christianity everywhere. And some Jews who had become Christians felt they still needed to follow Judaic laws. Also, cult religions had crept into the life of the church and infant believers could easily be swept in.

ILLUSTRATION: When I was a boy, I saw adults taking notes during sermons. I decided to take notes as well, but I couldn't figure out what to write. I understood numbers and facts so that's what I wrote down. I found some of my notes from childhood in a small spiral memo pad. In the pad were facts such as: there were twelve tribes of Israel. I had scripture references such as John 3:16. I had a notation there were sixty-six books in the Bible. I had another notation; the shortest scripture in the Bible is *Jesus wept*. I wrote *Jesus saves* because it made sense to me. The reason I wrote numbers and fact was because I was immature. I was just a kid. I Corinthians 13:11 says when I was a child I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I understood as a child but when I became a man I put away childish things. Something would be wrong if as an adult I was still hooked on numbers and facts and didn't understand the deeper truths of the Bible.

APPLICATION: It's important for believers to mature and the way to mature is through consistent growth. Just like a child, the child starts on milk, then matures to soft food, then matures to solid foods and at some point, the child can feed himself. Later, in life the child becomes an adult and buys his or her own food. No one hands the new born a steak and no one hands the teenager a jar of baby food peas

and carrots. I want you to think for moment about the challenge of preparing one lesson for new believers, mature believers, while at the same time keeping non-believers in mind.

MATURITY CHECKPOINT #4: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4: 15-19 ¹⁵ *Instead, (meaning, instead of being immature) speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Paul laid a foundation in all of this to speak the following truth in love:

¹⁷ *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.*

This is probably what Paul wanted to tell them from the beginning, but he spent time building up to this point.

Paul told Gentiles not to act like Gentiles. What did he mean by this? What he meant was once the Gentiles had become Christians they had taken on a new way of life.

APPLICATION: If everyone brought in their former ways of life before being saved, then the church will lose its unique purpose.

MATURITY CHECKPOINT #5: PUTTING ON CHRIST

Putting on Christ means letting go your past and beginning anew.

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:20-28 ²⁰ *That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Putting on Christ means being truthful; ²⁵ *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

Putting on Christ means keeping your anger under control; ²⁶ *“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,*

Putting on Christ means regular, ongoing, self-evaluation; ²⁷ *and do not give the devil a foothold. Our evaluative question must be “am I giving Satan a foothold?” Paul uses the example stealing as a foothold of Satan. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. In other words, the thief who comes to Christ should not use his hands to steal but should use his hands to do something for someone else.*

We can take this model and expand it:

- The one who is a tightwad - when the person puts on Christ, he or she should give.
- The one who is selfish – when the person puts on Christ, he or she should be unselfish.
- The one who uses his or her words to curse God and others – when the person puts on Christ, he or she should use the words to praise God and build up others.

MATURITY CHECKPOINT #6: BRINGING ALL EMOTIONS UNDER CHECK

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4: 29-32 ²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their*

needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* ³² *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

It looks like we've all got our homework to do. The maturity checkpoints from Ephesians chapter 4 are things we can all work on.

It's all about letting go of the self-made, selfish person, and taking on the person of Christ.

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