

# Ephesians 4:11-16

## Growing up into Christ

Today we will begin a **2 part series** looking at the text of **Ephesians 4:11-16**. In order to gain some **context** for Paul's address to the church here, let us consider the **literary, historical, and biblical context**.

**Literary** – In the **preceding** context... In **4:7-10** Paul has described the ascension and condescension of Christ and his giving of gifts to the church. The gifts are according to the **“measure of his grace,”** to each one of us who are in the one unified body. These gifts also include the 4-fold gifting of apostles, prophets, evangelist, and pastors and teachers.

In the **proceeding** context... In **4:17–24** Paul will call the church to put off their former life, with all of its corrupted thinking and desires, and therefore every practice of it. He then calls us to put on the new man who has been created and righteousness and holiness of the truth.

**Emphasis** - This literary context reveals .... **Christ has gifted the church to be equipped to grow up into his likeness...** verse 13, 15, and 24!

**Historical** – Ephesian believers were saved out of gross immorality and idolatry, with its immoral cultural and religious practices. Consider **Ephesians 4:17-24** describing the Ephesians former manner of life. **ESV Study Bible** - Ancient Ephesus forms an appropriate background to the book of Ephesians because of this city's fascination with magic and the occult (see Acts 19:19, and below). Paul emphasizes the power of God over all heavenly authorities (3:10-11) and on Christ's triumphant ascension as head over the church and over all things in this age and the next (1:19-21).

**Biblical context** – In this section of Ephesians **God's eternal purpose to build up the body of Christ** (4:13,15-16) so that they become **conformed to His image** and manifest His wisdom (Eph 3:10-11) is highlighted and explained. The central thought or **main idea** of this section is that **Christ has gifted the body of Christ to equip and build it up until, as each part does its work, it grows up into the maturity of the fullness of Christ**. Its structure can be seen in **2 parts**.

- **4:11-13 - Equipping and building up the body**
- **4:14-16 - Growing up into Christ**

**Ephesians 4:11-13** - 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of 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 a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. NASB

A. 11 He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers – Here Paul elaborates on the gifts given to the **“each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”** (v-7-8) Specifically, that **“some”** have received these **specific gifts** for a specific purpose of **“equipping”** the rest for the **“work of service,”** which he further elaborates on in v-12-13. Each one of us Christians have received the **grace of gifts** (v-7), but only **“some”** have received the grace of these specific **“equipping”** gifts. Paul does not elaborate on each of these **offices**, but simply mentions each one and the *general purpose* of them all, **working together to equip the saints**. This is by no means an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts, but simply a **list** of those **offices** within the church given for the **equipping** of the **saints** for their individual work of service (ministry). **apostles and prophets** – These have formerly done the work of **“laying the foundation”** of the **“dwelling where God lives by His Spirit”** (Eph 2:20) to **equip the saints**. This was accomplished by the **revelatory Word of Holy Scripture** which they brought forth **by the Spirit**, which laid the foundation of the church in word and practice. They gave us the **written Word** and an **example** of the **Christian life** lived out through the **local churches** which they **established**.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** - 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been **built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom **the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;** 22 in whom **you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.** NASB

The **“prophets”** Moses, David and Solomon (and other Psalm writers), and the Major and Minor Prophets have given us the **Old Testament** books, and the **“Apostles”** have given us the **New Testament** books, completing the canon. Thus, see here one main role the Apostles and Prophets played was a **revelatory work**, bringing us the written Word of God establishing the foundation of all Christian Life and practice. (2 Corinthians 12:12, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Hebrews 2:2-4)

**Hebrews 2:3-4** - 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was **at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit** according to His own will. NASB

**evangelists** – Do the ongoing work in the body of **preaching the gospel** and disciple-making to **equip the saints**, but with the specific emphasis on calling the church out of darkness of sin and the world and into the **Kingdom of God**. One **key role evangelists** play is not only preaching the Gospel, but **training** the rest of the **church** to preach the Gospel. Evangelists are vital in the **instruction** and **encouragement** to the rest of the church in regard to our evangelical duty.

**pastors and teachers** – Do the ongoing work of disciple-making in the church specifically through the ministry of preaching and teaching to **equip the saints**. The word “**pastors**” (poimen, poy-mane'—shepherd) is the word for **shepherds**, which is used elsewhere in the NT to refer to Christ (Heb 13:20, 1 Pet 2:25). Here coupled together with the word for **teachers** to **emphasize** the **work** of a **pastor** as a **teacher**. The ministry of a “**pastor-teacher**” is outlined in the books of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, where Paul gives practical instruction to pastors Timothy and Titus. Consider how the ministry of a pastor is described as a “**shepherd**” with the emphasis placed on his **work** in **teaching** the **Word**, shepherding the people by the teaching of the Word. Thus, Paul closely ties the words together as “**shepherd-teachers.**” **Pastor teachers** equip the **saints** for the **work** of the **ministry**, verse 12, who in turn do the **proper working** of each **individual part**, and this “**16 causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.**”

See here then how this **four-fold gifting** of Christ to His Church, “**apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors-teachers**” are given to establish the **foundation** of the church (apostles and prophets), and to **equip it** (evangelists and pastor-teachers) for the proper **work of ministry** to one another(v-12), focused on the **end goal** of Christian maturity into the **fulness of Christ**(v-13). It is vital therefore for Christians to **realize** their **own gifting** and work (calling) in order to fulfil God’s purpose in **building up** the body of Christ, “**16 according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.**”

B. for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ - Each one of these unique giftings, (apostles, prophets, evangelists,

pastors and teachers) fulfills the work of ***“equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry.”*** See here why much of the **ministry** in the **local Church** is focused on **teaching and learning**, as there is much to be **learned** as **disciples and followers of Christ**. Making **disciples** looks like what **Jesus did** with the **Twelve**. He was **always teaching** them God’s commandments and **Wisdom**. And so God has **gifted** the **Church** by calling certain individuals to carry on this **equipping** in the **local Church**. And when the Church is **equipped**, it is for the **work of ministry**, the **task** of all the **people** of the Church in reaching the **nations** with the **Gospel**, and **showing forth** that **Gospel** in the Church by **serving and caring for one another in love**. **ESV Study Bible** - *Those church leaders with various gifts (v. 11) are to equip the saints (all Christians) so that they can do the work of ministry. All Christians have spiritual gifts that should be used in ministering to one another (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 1 Pet. 4:10).*

So notice here, the **work of service** or ministry belongs to **“the saints.”** Every Christian has been **uniquely gifted** to fulfill the **“work of service.”** This work is the **privilege and responsibility** of every Christian and includes the expression of every **good gift and virtue** of Christ to **“edify the body”** until we have reached maturity in our **unity and knowledge** (v-13). The **“work of service”** is specifically for the **“building up of the body,”** thus **all the members of the body work together** with their **own gifting** for the purpose of **serving and building up** the rest of the body of Christ. Paul often writes of this work...

**Colossians 1:28** - 28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, **that we may present every man complete in Christ.** NASB

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** - 11 Therefore encourage one another, **and build up one another**, just as you also are doing. NASB

**1 Peter 4:10-11** - 10 As **each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.** 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; **so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ**, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. NASB

C. 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. – This **“equipping and building up”** is to continue until such time as we **“attain to the unity, knowledge, and maturity”** which Christ possesses. We are therefore to **“attain the unity of the faith”** which would

include the entire message of the Christian gospel, the whole body of Christian teaching. The **“knowledge of the Son of God”** would be to **“know Christ”** not only in experience, but to possess the **spiritual wisdom and understanding** of Person and Work of Christ. This all leads to the eventual **“maturity”** of the body, which is measured not by ourselves, but by the measure of **“the fullness of Christ!”** This is a lofty goal indeed! The **faithful Christian** presses toward a **goal**, high and lofty, and this **pressing forward** is the very nature of our **Christian experience**, UNTIL we have arrived at maturity, **“13 to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ!”**

**1 Corinthians 1:10** - 10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.**  
**Colossians 2:2-3** - 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and **attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,** 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. NASB

**ESV Study Bible - *The diversity of gifts serves to bring about the unity of Christ's people.*** *Mature manhood extends the body metaphor used earlier for the church and contrasts with “children” in the next verse 14 (see Heb. 5:11–14). Some people think that the learning of doctrine is inherently divisive, but it is people who divide the church, whereas the knowledge of the Son of God (both knowing Christ personally and understanding all that he did and taught) is edifying and brings about “mature manhood” when set forth in love (Phil. 3:10). It is vital therefore for us to realize that “the building up of the body of Christ” is not only the work of pastor-teachers, who only serve to equip the saints, but rather it belongs to the **collective body** and **all its members**, and happens as **“16 each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”** Let us also understand that we have scarcely arrived at our **goal**, which is the perfection and **“fulness of Christ!”** Therefore we press on to this **maturity**, to a **“mature man,”** in contrast to **“children tossed by every wind of teaching”** (v-14). We see then the vital work of each one of us in serving the body with our **own gifting** is a matter to which we **give ourselves fully**, so that the **body** can **grow** and **build itself up in love**. And the **goal** is this **fulness of Christ**, which we all see clearly as the **noonday sun**, yet we **never** quite arrive at fully, so we **press forward** to this maturity (Phil 3:12-14), and for the **glory of God and Christ** who **gifted us** with this **privilege** and responsibility.*

**Ephesians 4:14-16** - 14 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; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which 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. NASB

A. 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; - Since we are all working in the ministry to build one another up to **maturity**, we will **grow up** in our **salvation** and **“no longer be children.”** Children, or young immature Christians or churches, are carried away with dangerous and destructive doctrines (theological fallacies, practices, traditions or priorities,) which are prevalent within the professing church, put forth by the **“by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming”** of false teachers. These deceive for some purpose of personal gain.

**2 Peter 2:1-3, 18** - 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as **there will also be false teachers among you**, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 And **many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;** 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. 18 For speaking out **arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality**, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, NASB

Therefore, we see the **contrast** between **mature** and **immature** Christians and/or churches. **“Children”** here is contrasted with **“mature man”** (v-13) who has attained **“13 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.”** Whereas, **“children”** here are **“14 tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine.”** See here the **utmost priority** of sound **teaching** (doctrine) in a Christian’s life and in the local church. The immature Christian or church is **“doctrinally ignorant”** and the **mature Christian** or **church** is **“doctrinally grounded”** in the **knowledge** of the **Son of God**, and has reached significant **unity** of the **faith** with its members. The **goal** here then is to become **mature** in the **knowledge of Christ** and of the **will of God** for life and its meaning, purpose and duty. A **high view** of **God** and **His Word** and the proper balance of

sound teaching and practice and priorities that flow from it are, absolutely vital to the health, maturity and growth in a Christian's life and in the local church.

B. 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies – Here is how the body is built up, it is by “speaking the truth in love” that we grow up, that is through speaking and hearing and learning the truth.

**1 Peter 2:1-3** - 2:1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babes, **long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,** 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. NASB

Notice **truth in love = grow up into Him!** This is the equipping work of the pastor-teacher that equips “**the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ**” (v12)!

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** - 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. NASB

**2 Peter 1:2-4** - 2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. NASB

We then “**15 grow up in all aspects into Christ**”, which is to say that we attain the doctrinal knowledge of God's character and will as well as the personal experiential knowledge of Jesus Himself, which transforms more and more into His perfect likeness.

**2 Corinthians 3:18** - 8 But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. NASB

Here is **Christian maturity, “grown up into Him”**, that is, that we become like Him in thought, word and deed! And this is accomplished by the equipping of the saints AND as each member of the body fulfills its purpose supplying what is needed “**being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies,**” and as each part does its work in love (v-16).