

Ephesians 4:1-16

We begin by asking the question, what is a Christian? Paul tells us that in chapter 2. Once we were dead in our sins. Now we are alive spiritually. Here we're told even more about that. In v. 15 it says when you become a Christian Christ is your Head and you're the body. That is true for the Church.

In this powerful and important passage Paul tells us that even though we have the life of the Triune God in us, we live in spiritual immaturity until we're willing to do the hard work of developing and creating unity in the church.

What makes you a Christian is not just you're a nice person or a moral person. What makes you a Christian is you have the life of God in you. When you become alive to God in Christ, through the Spirit the life of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, comes into you. The gospel is this. You're not nice. You are a sinner. And so becoming a Christian means you become new. You're not just *nice*; you're new.

Here is the origin and goal of Christian ministry: its origin is in Christ, who gives spiritual gifts and gifted people to the church; and its goal is the upbuilding of the body of Christ in knowledge, faith, and love. But here's the problem. We live in spiritual immaturity.

What is the purpose of all this ministry? All the ministry that's going on in the church, all the ministry that's going on at First Pres, what's the purpose of it? Paul says it's all to prepare God's people for works of service so the body of Christ may be built up until we reach ... what? Until we become mature. All those prepositional phrases and modifiers and clauses are all about becoming spiritually mature, "... attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Everything that happens in the church is about preparing spiritual maturity.

But if that's the case, then it means we're all immature or we wouldn't need the church or that wouldn't be the job of the church. We are spiritual babies, and the reason we need to be part of the church is because,

otherwise, we stay infants. If Paul is able to say, “*We infants,*” *then what about the rest of us?* That means everyone, even the greatest of Christians, is immature, then that means most of us are really immature. The point is when you become a Christian, you get this new life, you’re an infant, and that’s good; but to stay an infant is horrible and very, very wrong. Therefore, Paul says we don’t want to stay infants.

What does it mean to be a spiritual baby? Paul alludes to three marks of being a spiritual infant or spiritually immature. Look with me. “Then we will no longer be infants ...” Then he describes it. “... blown here and there by every wind of teaching ...”

A. *Spiritual babies are not discerning.*

B. *Spiritual babies are incredibly self-centered.*

Therefore, Paul says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

C. *Spiritual babies are not steady.*

The mark of maturity is that you will live in obedience to God whether or not things are going well in your life, whether or not you’re having good feelings, but you just do it because you’re steady, because you’re enduring, because you’re patient.

If even Paul says, “We are infants,” there are two opposite things we’re need to keep in tension.

The first is *you should not be shocked at the immaturity of other believers.*

People aren’t saved by being mature. They’re saved by grace.

But here’s the other thing. *Don’t put up with spiritual immaturity in yourself.*

So we need to the hard work of developing and creating unity in the church. Paul says there is no growing into spiritual maturity just by you working on yourself as an individual. It’s right here. Paul says that it’s through deep involvement in a church community and through the increasing of the unity and the closeness of the relationships inside the Christian community that you will grow into maturity.

First of all, look how he defines maturity in verse 13. “... until we all

reach ...” What? How do you become mature? By growing in unity. Paul tells us here the aim is unity of faith and unity of knowledge in the Son of God. What that means, of course, is very simple. If you want to become more and more like Jesus, if you want to have this divine life come so that you’re born again, and you grow into maturity, it only happens when that life of the Trinity is reflected in this life in the community.

The basic principle is you have to have this close, loving, genuine community, but the specific practice and the key to growing in maturity through community is right there in verse 15. I want you to realize the rest of your life just how much you need this. It says in verse 15, “... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” That’s it. There’s the practice. You will not grow, I will not grow, unless we are plunged into a community of people who have this perfect balance of truth and love in their speaking.

Think about this. *Love without truth is deadly. But truth without love is also deadly.*

Truth without love does not accomplish truth. Love without truth does not accomplish love. Unless we have love and truth together, we can’t grow.

On the cross, why did Jesus die? First of all, because of the truth. The truth is we are sinners, and we are lost. Unless someone pays for that sin, we are lost eternally. On the other hand, there’s also love. Jesus went to the cross because He loved us.

Unless you know you’re that loved, you won’t accept the truth that you’re that lost.

Until you know you’re that lost, you won’t understand the magnitude of His love.

The gospel is the ultimate message of truth and love. If you understand it and you take it in and you realize He did this for you on the cross, that humbles you out of ever telling the truth abrasively (without love), and it affirms you out of your need to always please people (without truth). Therefore, you’ll begin to speak the truth in love exactly the way you

need to so that we can be a community in which, “we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”