

How the Body Grows  
Ephesians 4:11-16

Turn to Ephesians 4. This paragraph in Ephesians is about how the church body works, what it is supposed to do. This Scripture tells us what we're aiming at, and how to move toward it, and it also tells us what it looks like when it's not working, when the body is failing.

In some ways this is not a good time to talk about church body life, because the covid virus has put limits on our doing things together. We are more isolated from each other than we were before. Body life, as we lived it before, is now limited, restricted. Church body life has never been easy, but now there are a whole new set of challenges.

But there are things we can still do, and the Lord encourages us to do those things. Never mind the things we cannot do, let's think about the ways we are still in touch with each other. The ways we are still in contact are essential, even when they feel small. They are important. The ways we can still speak to each other, or meet in church, or somewhere else, or do something for someone, encourage or thank someone – these all matter a great deal, more than we thought.

Our Scripture is Ephesians 4:11-16. That's six verses, and we'll go through them one at a time.

1, Christ Gave Leaders to the Church – Eph 4:11

*Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*

The church has never really been a democracy. It is certainly true that we are all brothers and sisters to each other, and in that fundamental sense we are all on the same level. But Jesus had not been in ministry very long before he called and appointed the twelve. Then in the first missionary trip of Paul and Barnabas, they appointed elders in every church.

And these are from Christ himself. Christ gives big picture leaders: apostles and prophets and evangelists; and he gives local church leaders as well, the shepherds and teachers. Christ gives his church leaders to get the body going in the right direction.

2, To Build Up the Body of Christ – Eph 4:12

Three phrases describe what the leaders do. What are the leaders supposed to do for the rest of us? *To equip the saints, for works of service, to build up the body of Christ.* The leaders equip us for works of service. Because of the leaders, the saints become workers who serve the body.

Back in verse 7 of this chapter, Paul writes that Christ has given every believer a “grace,” a gift. Every believer. And in verse 16 Paul will write that each part of the body of Christ has its own work to do. That's what we have here in verse 11 as well.

*To equip the saints, for works of service, to build up the body of Christ.* The service of the saints is to build up the body of Christ. Christ has given us each our own grace to use, and leaders so that we will serve and build up the body of Christ.

Believers sometimes get blocked on this, because they don't know what their gift is. "What is my gift?" is the wrong question. "How will I love the church?" is the right question. "What can I do for the church?" "How could I love these people?"

For each of us, there is a long list of things that don't work, we can't do those. Never mind that. There are always things we can do. "How can I show love to the Lord's people?" Christ gave each of us our own "grace" gift, and he gave us leaders to equip us, so that this would happen, so that we would build up the body of Christ.

### 3, Unity in the faith and the knowledge – Eph 4:13

There is a strong pull toward unity: *Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, becoming a mature man, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* Building up the body always has an eye toward unity.

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. Verse 15 begins "speaking the truth." The faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, and the truth, are three different ways of saying the same thing.

"The faith" here means what Christians believe, the core truths we hold on to that make us Christians. That's "the faith." Most of these truths are about Jesus, the Son of God. So "the faith" and "the knowledge of the Son of God" both describe the truths about Christ that we build our lives on.

So when v15 begins, "speaking the truth," "the truth" is the same thing as "the faith" which is the same as "the knowledge of the Son of God."

"Until we all reach unity in the faith." The basic Christian truths about Christ always produce unity, and that is the goal, to be one unified body. In Paul's day, they did not have that unity yet. He wrote Ephesians because there were troubles between Gentile believers and Jewish believers. I'm not sure the church has ever had this unity. But that is the goal, that the faith, the truths about Christ, would make the church a mature man.

In the middle of v13, Paul makes the goal of the church to be a mature man, not just a mature adult, but specifically a mature man. Most translations don't read that way, I suppose because it does not feel gender friendly. Gender friendly is a good thing, but this time they should have let it stand as a mature man.

We are talking about the body of Christ, Christ being the head, and the church being the body. Jesus of Nazareth was man, not a woman, so the body of Christ will be pictured as a man's body. In the next chapter, Eph 5, Paul uses a different image of the church, the bride of Christ, which is obviously a woman. In Eph 5 Paul pictures the church as a woman, and here in Eph 4 as a man.

The goal is unity, and the basic Christian faith, the core truths about Jesus Christ, will produce a church operating like a mature man, the body of Christ in all his fullness. And all of our loving service for each other builds up this unity and oneness.

This unity depends on the teachings of the true faith, and also on all the common ways we take care of each other and help each other and show concern for each other.

#### 4, Not Scattered by Every Wind of Teaching – Eph 4:14

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

When Marilyn and I lived on Aspen Bay, it was not paved. So after it rained in summer, there were many puddles on the road, and water in the ditch. And we had four children who were all of an age to enjoy a good puddle and a full ditch. So we would dress them for the occasion, and go for a walk. And it seemed that every child had to experience every puddle and every ditch. It could take twenty minutes to go a hundred feet.

That's fine for children, but the Lord of the church does not want the church to be like that. The church should be one mature man, the body of Christ, not a crowd of infants each on their own. What is it that turns a mature man into a group of infants, tossed on the waves in a storm, like a leaf blown around by a strong wind? What makes the church a bunch of infants? Teaching, human teaching, all the wrong kinds of deceitful crafty teaching.

The faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, and the truth: these produce unity. Every wind of teaching, on the other hand, tosses us around and scatters us, and on a spiritual level we become divided children instead of one man.

For the last while Christians around here have sometimes been sharply divided in response to covid and its implications. Where these things separate us, deceitful human teaching has taken hold, and divides us. The faith and the truth would never divide us. There are always differences of opinion, but division and sharp separation always mean bad teaching in here somewhere.

My brothers and sisters, pick your teachers wisely. Be careful who your teachers are. Every human can be fooled. We are all vulnerable to this crafty teaching. False teaching was a big problem in NT times, and it has never not been a problem.

Two things make deceitful teaching dangerous. One, the false message appeals to some legitimate human desire. It will satisfy something that's good, the desire itself is not bad. Two, there will always be some of God's real truth mixed in. Along with the bad message, there will be some good theology. And the teaching, in spite of these is deceitful and destructive.

This is why Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. Christ gave these leaders so we would have the truth, the knowledge of the Son of God, and we would know what to believe.

I feel sorry for people, I know that you can find shepherds and teachers on all sides of this, so how are you supposed to know? But it has always been like that. Paul told the Ephesians elders to their faces that some of them would turn and start teaching garbage. If it happened then it happens now. Be careful, my brothers and sisters, about deceitful teaching, and your teachers.

#### 5, Speaking the Truth in Love – Eph 4:15

*Instead, 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.*

“The truth” is “the faith,” as in “what we believe,” and it is “the knowledge of the Son of God,” since the truth and the faith are mostly about Jesus the Son of God.

If I am loyal to the truth, and I speak this truth to someone outside the truth, but I do not speak in love, then I am condemned. (repeat). This is difficult for me, the love part, because I get upset, but it is still true. And if I speak with love, but don't speak God's truth, I am still no use at all.

If the body is going to be built up, then we will speak God's truth to one another, the truth about Christ, and we will speak it in love, so that the person listening knows there is real concern. Otherwise, I'm trying to take a speck out of your eye, and I have a plank in my own eye. If someone was taking a bit of dirt out of your eye, you would want them to be careful, real careful!

#### 6, Body Life: A Work of Love

*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.*

From Christ, the whole body builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. “Work” is mentioned twice in our paragraph. It was in v12, “to prepare the saints for works of service,” and it is here at the end, “as each part does its work.” Body life takes work. Not everything that feels like work is good, but quite a bit of good and loving service is also work.

And “love” is mentioned twice as well, “speaking the truth in love,” the body “grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

There is a lot of good body life among us. The people who lead regularly on Sunday, and we have many regulars. You count everyone you see at the front every month, it is quite a few. And I'll tell you that anything we do on a regular schedule feels like work sometimes.

And many things happen in the rest of the week. Someone from this church cleared the snow off our driveway on Tuesday. How nice is that! And people bring food to us once in a while, baking or something else. And we get encouraging emails, and phone calls and also real visits! And some serve behind the scenes, working alone, because they love the Lord and his people.

These things might all seem commonplace, no big deal, but that's not true. These are what hold us together, and make the body grow. The Lord is not asking here that each one of us would become more mature. No, he wants his body as a single living organism to become mature. He wants his body as a single living being to more and more express of his own fullness.

That means that all the ways we connect with each other are loaded, rich, full. It all counts, it all matters. In v7, v12, and again in v16, we are told that each of us has a part to play. When any one of us drops out, we all lose, because we never get the grace that the Lord gave that brother or sister. We bring the Lord's grace to each other in many different ways, such a good thing.

Christ gave each of us a grace, a gift. Christ gave the church its leaders so equip the saints for works of service, to build up the body of Christ. From Christ, the whole body builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. And we grow to become the mature body of Christ. Amen.

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank you for your body the church. Thank you for the countless ways each one of us has been encouraged and helped by gifts of all kinds from one another. Thank you for giving each of us our own measure of your grace. Thank you that you've given us love for each other, and also a willingness to work in our service. None of this happens without your doing. Be our Shepherd, and keep us growing in the right direction. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.