

The Five Pillars of a Mature Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel ⁶ that has come to you.

Colossians 1:3-6

Living in a day and age when most people no longer trust organized religion either due to sexual and financial scandals of its leaders or due to the constant infighting and conflict amongst its members, it is difficult for churches to keep their doors open. Using numeric growth and



financial viability as litmus tests of “success,” many churches have chosen to “sell” their version of the truth by watering down the message to make it more palatable to society. While this strategy attracts Christian “pretenders” and those whom are “lukewarm,” whom amongst us truly wants Christ to see your church as being so vile that He spits us out of His mouth? Wouldn’t it be nice to have Christ physically walk down the aisle of your church and state that He has heard of your faith and the treasures you are storing up in heaven? For today’s church to live a life worthy of the calling they have received

the focus must not be just on numbers and finances but primarily on spiritual maturity in the eyes of Christ! This sermon is going to outline five pillars of church maturity as Paul outlines in Ephesians 4:1-16 in the hope that this might inspire you to take them back to your church leaders and have them implemented for the glory and honor of God!

Pillar 1: Remember Your Calling

To become a spiritually mature church in the eyes of Christ begins with a remembrance and appreciation of one’s calling. “To live a life worthy of the calling” implies that there are

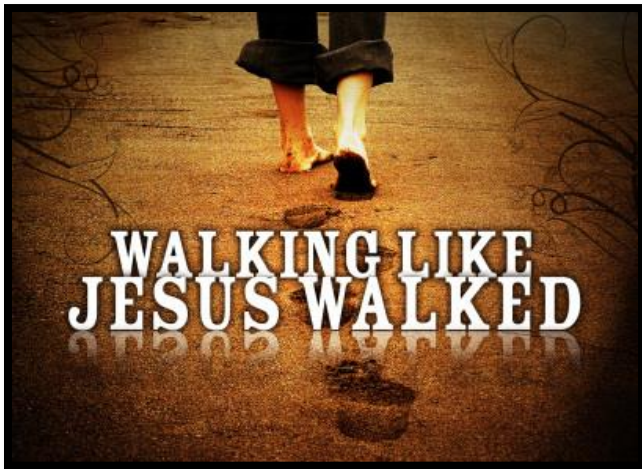
standards or expectations that God has for His people¹ that are to be firmly rooted in a person the moment they accept His gracious gift of salvation. Drunk with sin (James 1:14) we used to think



the broad path (Matthew 7:13) was a utopia of pleasure but deep inside our souls we were broken, constantly yearning to know He whom created us! It was God who called us from being the gossips, God-haters, insolent, arrogant ones (Romans 1:30) who felt the cross was foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18), from “darkness to the wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9)!² It is in this depravity that we as Gentiles were called to be His children (Ephesians 1:4-5). What we were incapable of doing, seeking and following God, was accomplished through His grace and our faith in a risen Savior (Ephesians 2:8-9). Spiritual maturity

inside of the church begins with its members remembering that in the face of such a great salvation God expects them to honor His name by following the footsteps of Christ and by doing the works He has prepared in advance for them to do (Ephesians 2:10)!³

Pillar 2: Imitate the Character of Christ



If a church is to obtain spiritual maturity, then its members must strive to obtain the character of Christ! Knowing that we were purchased at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20) should compel us to no longer conform to the ways of this world (Romans 12:2) that left us “spiritually bankrupt, emotionally warped, and morally naked.”⁴ God expects those “have been united with Christ in His resurrection and exaltation” (Ephesians 1:20-22)⁵ to put off the old self that was “being corrupted by their deceitful desires”

(Ephesians 4:22-24) and invite Him to transform the attitudes of their minds to focus on

¹ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 93.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 122.

³ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 275.

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, 122.

⁵ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 275.

whatever is true, noble, right, pure, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). While this process of becoming more like Jesus begins when He enters a person's heart, obtaining the character of Christ is an ongoing process of surrendering one's sinful desires while constantly battling the powers of this dark world (Ephesians 6:12)! The spiritual maturity of the church is dependent on its members embracing the power of Jesus to change and sanctify their character so that they might become like God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22)

²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (4:2)

Paul lists five key “foundational stones” or pillars of our character that needs special attention if we are to be like Christ.⁶ First, those who were saved not by works but at a price are



to put off their pride and self-assertion and embrace a **humble** attitude of serving God and one another out of love (Philippians 2:3). Second, to be like Jesus one must put off the worldly inclination to aggressively insist on getting one's way⁷ and put on a genuine desire to **gently** look out for the interests of others. Third, to strive to be like Jesus, whom was “meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29),⁸ is to be accomplished by being **patient** with the “shortcomings” of those around us.⁹

Fourth, to be more like Christ one must put off the desire to abruptly tear down another person (especially one's enemies) and choose to love and **forbear** them like God has done with His people (Romans 2:4, 9:22; 1 Timothy 1:16).¹⁰ And last and most important, the crowing virtue that we are to emulate from Christ's character is that of love.¹¹ We are to constantly remember that without **love** for God and one another our service to Him is nothing more than a “resounding gong or clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!

Pillar 3: Seek Unity

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (4:3-6)

⁶ Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 229.

⁷ Ibid., 230.

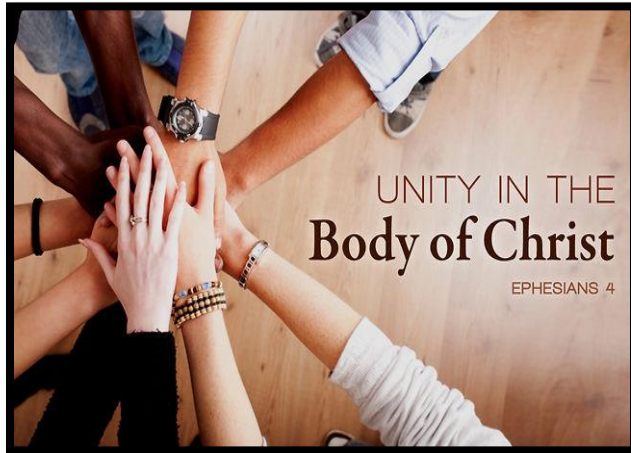
⁸ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 277.

⁹ Ibid., 278.

¹⁰ Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 230.

¹¹ Ibid.

If a church is to become spiritually mature, then her members must make every effort to maintain the bond of peace. One of the key reasons people leave the church is that they either instigated or became involved in conflict. The church's unity is to be maintained by the



knowledge that there is but one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God; not many!¹² Unity and cohesion of the body of Christ is maintained when its members listen to the one Spirit that has given them life!¹³ The church is the body of Christ and as such is to be one and indivisible.¹⁴ Paul told the church of Philippi if they had any comfort from being united with Christ and His love they were to make his joy complete by learning to be like minded, one in spirit and mind (2:1-4). This does not mean that we are to jettison fundamental truths in order to maintain the

peace,¹⁵ but are to forbear one another when our interpretations of the one faith of Scripture differ! When it comes to disagreements over whom is “in charge” the bond of peace can be maintained with the knowledge of God’s supremacy,¹⁶ and the reality that we are all accountable to His Son to be judged for the things done in the body both good and bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Pillar 4: Use Your Spiritual Gifts

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 - 4:7-9).

Those churches that want to become spiritually mature need to encourage their members to use the spiritual gifts they have been given. Quoting Psalms 68 which is a call and praise for God’s acts of deliverance in the past,¹⁷ Paul now reflects on Christ’s gifts given to the people. Upon His descent at the incarnation and through the giving of the Holy Spirit¹⁸ Christ gave “different kinds of endowments or abilities” to each member of the church.¹⁹ Praise be to God that every single believer has at least one special ability.²⁰ While Romans 12:6-6; 1 Corinthians

¹² Peter Thomas O’Brien, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#), 279.

¹³ Ibid., 281.

¹⁴ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians](#), 96.

¹⁵ Peter Thomas O’Brien, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#), 280.

¹⁶ R. C. Sproul, [The Purpose of God: Ephesians](#) (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1994), 100.

¹⁷ Peter Thomas O’Brien, [The Letter to the Ephesians](#), 288.

¹⁸ Ibid., 294.

¹⁹ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians](#), 101.

²⁰ R. C. Sproul, [The Purpose of God: Ephesians](#), 101.

Also, those churches that call pastors that only preach to satisfy what the itching ears of today's lukewarm and carnal Christians want to hear will remain spiritually immature because her members lack sound teaching and the passion to become more like Christ (2 Timothy 4:3). After all, without unity of faith and unity of knowledge of God our churches are doomed to fragment into oblivion.²⁸ To attain the full measure of Christ the church is to call and listen to the misters God has sent her way.

Conclusion: Spiritual Maturity Promised

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. 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. 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 (4:14-16)

Those churches that remember their calling, imitate the character of Christ, seek unity, use their spiritual gifting and call leaders whom will equip and edifying the body of Christ, Paul promises will become spiritually mature. The good news is that if you are in a church whose members are immature, have erratic temperament, promotes individualism,²⁹ and has teaching that is “watered down” to satisfy itching ears; you can change! The whole measure of the fullness of Christ is attainable when its members become so passionate about their salvation that they are willing to obey and walk in His footsteps. To keep rivalry, suspicion, hatred, pride³⁰ and conflict away the people of the church need to remember that since He who is the head of the church will hold them accountable, they are to do everything to promote the bonds of peace. And finally, for a church to attain spiritual maturity its members must use their God given gifts to fulfill the divine roles that they have been assigned. Those churches whom can fulfill all five pillars will welcome Christ to physically come down their aisles for they know they will hear the words “good and faithful servants!”

²⁸ R. C. Sproul, *The Purpose of God: Ephesians*, 104.

²⁹ Arthur G. Patzia, *Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, 245.

³⁰ Ibid.