

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

INTRODUCTION

Having last time looked at the gifts that God grants to his church I want to focus again on the purpose of these gifts before we move on to complete this little section. In the Greek verses 11-16 are one complete sentence therefore we need to deal with these verses as one complete section

1. THE PURPOSE OF THESE GIFTS (v 12)

a) To prepare God's people for works of service. - The word translated 'prepare' could be translated equipment, so that the purpose of the gifts of Pastor teacher etc granted to the church is to give the church the equipment in order that the church might do the work of service. The gifts listed are given in order to help the church develop and become more complete.

The word translated 'works of service' was used originally for waiting upon tables and then later the word was used for service of various kinds but it was mainly used of humble service. It was a word that was used for Deacons within the church for they were servants of the church; they were to do works of service towards their fellow Christian members. We need to notice that it is God's people that is; the whole of God's people who are equipped by the pastoring and teaching within the church for works of service. Every member of this church has a work of service to do, therefore the work of ministry or service is not left to a few faithful people, it is not left to those who are full time in the work or those who are keener but it is the task of every church member to do works of service.

Now it is sad that in churches there are Christians who claim to love the Lord but they come and they go from church, they receive from the ministry of the word but they seem to think that their task ends with their attendance on a Sunday. No one ever sees or hears from them again until the next Sunday and that is how it goes on year after year.

It is also sad that these same people are often quite gifted people who could contribute a lot to the cause of God and that their fellow Christians would benefit greatly if they only used their gifts that God has given them for his purposes. Why is this? Why does this happen in churches? Some of the fault lies within the leadership of the church because perhaps they have not been encouraged to use their gifts, as they should have.

But on many occasions the fault lies with the individual they are simply so self centred that their whole life is centred on themselves and on the needs of their family, they simply never think of their responsibility towards their fellow church members. When that situation arises in any church and I don't know a church that doesn't have those types of people then that church is not functioning to its fullest potential and is not being built up as it should be. Now there is something else that I want you to notice and it is that service for God does not have to be prominent for it to be called service.

The word as I have pointed out was to be used for the mundane trivial tasks that are a necessary part of life.

So the preacher is doing works of service but so is the one who is doing the practical jobs around the church or the ones who cleans the church every week or the ones who do the many other background jobs that many of you will not even know happen. I want us all to see that what we do for God's people is service to the Lord. So that phone call to the lonely, that hospital visit that practical job that we did for our sister in Christ that lift that we gave that person to church is if done with the right attitude a service for God.

It is seen by him as such and will be rewarded by Him as such. Now the second purpose of Christ granting his church various gifts is:

b) So that the body of Christ might be built up (v 12) - So Christ grants his people various gifts and his purpose is that they might do works of service and as they do those works of service the body of Christ will be built up. So a church mature and grows and is built up when every member gifted by the Lord fulfils his or her role through his or her works of service. So it is not my job as Pastor to see that the church is growing and maturing O I have a part to play and I will accept that my role as Pastor teacher is a vital and important role but actually unless we all use our gifts for the purpose that they have been given then our church will not grow as it ought to be doing.

So when the church is not growing it can so often be the case the church looks at the leadership and often the Pastor and asks questions of him but the truth is that when a church is not growing and maturing then every member has to look at himself and herself. I have seen churches were they think that all they have to do is to call a Pastor and everything will get better.

Well it is true that calling a Pastor enhances the church and helps the church to grow but building the church up is not the Pastor's task alone or the task of the Eldership it is the task of us all as members of this church. Churches are built up when every member uses his or her God given gifts to do works of service and when we all function as we ought to function individually then the church will function as it ought too and the result will be a building up of the church.

Now I think Paul is thinking about spiritual maturity when he is thinking of the church being built up but it surely is true that when every member uses their gifts then we will have a greater impact upon our society which in time and God willing will surely build the church numerically as men and woman come to faith as a result of our acts of service towards them.

c) So that the body of Christ might reach unity in the faith (v 13) – God's ultimate goal is that all Christians will use their gifts in order that they will pursue unity. The different spiritual gifts that God grants to his church do not divide the church but they should unite it. Each gift contributes something to the church's knowledge of the Son of God and so the church grows spiritually. The church then presses on towards maturity in the faith but it's maturity in unity, which comes from knowing and trusting and growing up into Christ.

We have already noted that the unity of the church is not something that we can manufacture it is something given and granted to us as a result of our faith in Christ Jesus. But as we have already seen it is the church's task to maintain that unity (v 3) and now Paul is saying that the church is to reach this unity. If unity in the Spirit already exists as a gift then how can the church reach the unity in the faith? I think the answer lies in the fact that just, as unity needs to be kept visibly so it needs to be reached fully.

If you like think of unity as growing, we are united in Christ but that unity needs to grow and develop until we come to that full unity which happens when the church has that knowledge of the Son of God that will make her completely mature. True unity cannot grow without Christian faith or knowledge on the contrary it is precisely because we know and trust the Son of God that we grow in the kind of unity with one another that God desires from us.

So as we all exercise our gifts in works of service we all learn more about our faith and more about Jesus Christ. As our knowledge of Him grows and matures so will our unity with one another. This maturity is a constant and a continual growing until we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. We are to keep on growing and maturing until we like Christ are fully mature, until we are as mature as we can be.

Now obviously we could apply this personally but Paul's point is that the church is to do this collectively, every church should be maturing every year, our knowledge of Christ should be increasing our faith in him and our understanding of the faith should also be developing and this carries on throughout the life of the church. No church and no individual has reached the full measure of maturity no church is as mature as it could be but that is to be our goal and one day that goal will be reached but not in this world but when we reach glory and there we will be perfectly united with God's church and the church will be as mature as it ever possibly could be it will be as mature as Christ himself. Is that our aim as a church, to be as mature as we can be? Is our church developing have you seen that maturity grow over the years. For that to happen; every member has to mature in Christ.

Really a church is only as strong as its weakest member and so every one of us needs to examine our own lives we need to ask are we personally maturing in our faith and in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Is our head knowledge growing do we know more of Christ now that last year. But head knowledge does not bring about maturity only heart knowledge brings about real biblical growth and maturity in the faith and in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

I am often amazed at how immature some Christians can be. People who have been Christians for 10 or 20 years and yet their knowledge of the faith is so poor just like a very young babe in Christ. There is something wrong spiritually with such a person. As a church we must encourage such people to mature to develop and as they do so and as we do so then collectively God's church here in Wensleydale will grow and mature.

2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MATURITY IN THE CHURCH (vs. 14-16)

I suppose a question that comes to my mind is how do you know when you are mature. What should we expect to see in a mature Christian and in a mature church? Well Paul goes on to list some of the things that will be seen in a mature church.

a) A mature church knows what it believes (v 14). A mature church is not to be like little infant who is easily influenced. When someone becomes a Christian then you expect a certain amount of immaturity but there is something wrong as I have said when someone stays immature, that person has a spiritual disability he or she has stunted growth. Likewise when a church comes into being you expect a certain amount of immaturity there especially if the church has come into being through recent converts.

But that new church ought to be growing transforming and developing as it grows in its faith knowledge and love for the Lord. The sign of an immature church or individual is that they are easily influenced by every new doctrine that comes along. They are like a boat in a rough sea with no engine at the mercy of the wind.

A church should not be so easily influenced that every time a new teaching comes along they go along with it and then another teaching comes along so they go in that direction and so they don't know what way to go. A mature church will be able to assess every new teaching that comes along it will be able to resist the false doctrines and the false practises that are often presented in very attractive ways. Now we have seen just how immature our churches in Britain have been over the last decade.

We had various healing gurus over the last decade that has turned churches from preaching centres to healing centres.

We have had the so called Toronto blessing which has turned many immature churches into a circus, we now have New Covenant Theology that is turning churches from a proclamation of the gospel to dialogue. The truth is there will always be new teachings and new ideas for that is Satan's job to try and confuse people and to deceive the church. He uses people who are cunning and often use crafty methods in their attempt to deceive the church.

Satan uses men who deliberately scheme who are willing to use any means and to do anything in order to trick the church in order to further their own aims and achieve their own goals. Now we need to realise there are plenty of crafty and deceitful people out there in the world and sadly in the church who are ready to take advantage of gullible churches and gullible Christians who are not mature but are still like little infants. But mature churches and mature Christians will see through it all and will continue growing and maturing in their faith and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

b) A mature church is a growing church (v 15) – The word 'but' introduces a very different course of action from those immature believers who are blown about by every latest new fad. A mature Christian and a mature church will speak the truth in love. Literally what Paul says here is 'truthing in love' for he is not just thinking about

speech although that is of course part of what Paul means. But he is thinking of Christians and churches that are truthful in all that they say and do.

But in being truthful they must also manifest the quality of love as well. It is possible to live truthful lives that are really repulsive to others because love is lacking. It's not just a case of doing right but it is doing right with the right and gracious attitude. The truthful lives of God's people are to be commended to people because of the love that they demonstrate in the midst of being truthful.

It is not easy to be truthful in this world, this world lives by lies, and we are fed lies from the media, from our employers and employees, our families and from our Schools as well. People have got so use to being lied too that they don't believe anyone anymore. So are people going to listen to the church and accept what they proclaim as truth?

Well I think you know the answer to that is No; unless we show that our all our lives are truthful and not just our words and unless we show that truthful life with hearts that are full of love for people. Once people begin to see that the church really is truthful in all that it says and does and when they see that this truth is not hard or harsh but gracious and loving then perhaps they might start listening to our message once again.

If we are 'truthing in love' then we will be a growing church that does not mean growing in numbers although that might be the case but growing up into Christ who is our head. The church of Jesus Christ is not static it is growing, but this growth is not growth at any price or by any method it is growing up into Him It is growing into the likeness of our head. This growth we are told is in 'all things' this is a wholehearted growth this growth covers all areas.

So the Christian is not someone who grows up in doctrine but not in love, who grows in evangelism but not in attitude towards fellow believers. Every aspect of the Christian is to be growing and so is the church. The church is not to be static, stuck almost in a rut, it is to be growing and maturing and of course this is done as every Christian grows up into Christ in all things. So can you see this church maturing in all the years you have been here? Is there a growing up of believers and growing up in attitudes and in love and in action and in worship of our God?

Is there a maturing among the Eldership and among our members? Well this will be the consequences of maturity, maturity does not mean that we sit back thinking we have made it, No maturity means that we know that we have not made it that we have much to learn that we have a long way to go that we need to continue to mature. It's immature to think we have made it.

For example teenagers can be difficult people. They often give you the impression that they know everything about everything. Talk about something and they have an answer or at least an opinion. But when they grow up and become adults then they begin to realise how little they do know and that the answers to the world's problems are not as simple as they thought. Now what has happened is that they have become mature, they have realised that they have a long way to go.

Now let me ask you again are you growing up into Christ is this church doing that?

But it's one thing to talk about growing into Him but how do we do this. Well verse 16 tells us we do by Christ for it's from him that growth comes. Paul is saying that the Christian life is not lived in unrestrained use of human resources; it depends on Christ who supplies his people with everything they need for spiritual growth. This is true of the whole body, its not that some parts of the body of Christ needs his resources and others use their own resources.

All members of the body of Christ draw our nourishment from the head. After all we are joined and held together by Him and the tense use here is a continuous tense this is constantly taking place. Christ it is who 'fits together' (AV) individual believers and knits them together and continues to hold them together in the body of Christ.

Christ does this by every supporting ligament, which is literally 'every ligament of supply,' and the word for "supply" takes us back to the idea of supplying what is needed in this process. Paul's point is that this growing process involves a fitting in with other Christians; it involves having our rough edges knocked off us so that we can fit perfectly together with our fellow believers into the body of Christ.

As this process takes place it is Christ who supplies all we need in order that we might grow up into him and in order that we might be held together in the body. This is why love is at the heart of church growth (v 16), love for the Lord and for his people enables us to live together with my brothers and sisters in Christ as Christ fits us and knits us together in the body of Christ.

Therefore as each part of Christ's body fits in with the rest of the body; then the body functions properly. The church is that body and so as you grow spiritually into Christ and as we all do that then Christ fits us together and holds us together in the body. When a new member joins us then we have to be reshaped so that they can fit into the body of Christ perfectly.

But this growing and reshaping is not a passive thing on our part, we have to do our work, we have to do our part in the body we are to fulfil our function, we are to use our gift, we are not to dominate others but we are fulfil our duties if the body in Wensleydale is to function properly.

When as members of the body of Christ we are growing and using our God given gifts within the context of God's church and doing this in love and with truthfulness then the result is that the church of Jesus Christ is built up.

So let us not be an infant church but let us be mature, let us be a church that is 'truthing in love' and let us be a church that knows what we believe so that we are not easily swayed by deceivers.

Let us grow up into Christ our head and let us rely upon him for the necessary resources to do this. Finally let us use our God given gifts so that our part in the body will do its work and as we all do this then the church will be 'built up in love.'

Amen