

## Sermon 1, March 10: Ascension and Maturity, Ephesians 4:7-16

**Proposition:** Because Christ has ascended to the Father's right hand and from there poured out the gift of the fivefold ministry, our church can and must grow up to a grace-powered maturity that looks like Jesus.

- I. Ascension: Christ Gives Grace from the Father's Right Hand, vv. 7-12
  - A. Grace Given According to Jesus' Generosity, v. 7
  - B. Grace Given from on High: Psalm 68:18, vv. 8-10
  - C. Grace-Given Humans, v. 11
- II. Maturity: Christ's Grace-Gifts Build up the Body, vv. 13-16
  - A. The Method of Bodybuilding in the Church, v. 12
    1. The Fivefold Ministry Equips, v. 12a
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  - C. The Goal of Bodybuilding in the Church, vv. 13-14
    1. Unity of Faith
    2. Knowledge of God's Son
    3. Mature Manhood
    4. Doctrinal settledness
    5. Not Walking the Counsel of the Wicked
  - D. The Habits of Bodybuilding in the Church, vv. 15-16
    1. Telling the truth lovingly
    2. Connecting with the body
    3. Loving each other
- III. Ascension Drives Maturity
  - A. Growth and Bodybuilding Comes Only from Jesus' Work
  - B. Our Ministry Work Is Necessary
  - C. Our Ministry Work Is Powered by Jesus' Royal Grace

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Easter Sunday is only three weeks away. Last year I spoke to you about Hebrews 2 and how Christ's resurrection has delivered us from the fear of death. This year, though, we are going to take a break from Hebrews to do a five-week miniseries titled Your Changing Body. I'm deliberately taking this cringe-inducing title from one of those old health textbooks you were forced to read as a teenager. The fact of the matter is, our

church body here is changing. There are some new faces in the pews. There are only a few families left who were here when I started pastoring this church eight years ago.

As our body changes, we need to be sure that we are changing toward maturity. We don't just want to grow — as much as we all like to grow. We want to grow up. There's a difference between growing and growing up. One refers only to the size, but the other to maturity. So in our series, we are going to look at five different components of maturity that Scripture relates directly to Christ's triumphal entry, death, resurrection, and ascension. We will start today with the last one of those — His ascension, which we have also been talking about in Hebrews for the last several months. Ephesians 4 has a lot to say about how Christ's ascension into heaven relates to our maturity, our growing up as a body of Christians in Gillette, Wyoming. What I hope to show you this morning is that because Christ has ascended to the Father's right hand and from there poured out the gift of the fivefold ministry, our church can and must grow up to a grace-powered maturity that looks like Jesus.

### **I. Ascension: Christ Gives Grace from the Father's Right Hand, vv. 7-12**

The Jesus who came down and ascended on high is the Jesus who gives these gifts.

#### **A. Grace Given According to Jesus' Generosity, v. 7**

The standard by which Christ decides how much grace you'll receive is how much He gives you.

You have every spiritual blessing.

#### **B. Grace Given from on High: Psalm 68:18, vv. 8-10**

God's ascension and receiving of gifts was directed toward His presence among you  
“And behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you” (Num 18:6 NAS)

For the Almighty, to give and to receive are the same thing  
God lived on earth as a man, and as a man He went as low as it is possible to go. This descent is matched on the other side by His ascent, also as man, above all the heavens.

Don't let your amazing grace get detached from the amazing Christ who gives that grace. His descent and ascent and filling shows that He conquered. He conquered and holds everything

#### **C. Grace-Given Humans, v. 11**

If you are a Christian, then you have apostles. You have prophets. You have evangelists. You have pastor-teachers. These are Christ's gifts to you.

### **II. Maturity: Christ's Grace-Gifts Build up the Body, vv. 13-16**

These gifts train you so that together, every-member ministry builds the body

#### **A. The Method of Bodybuilding in the Church, v. 12**

##### **1. The Fivefold Ministry Equips, v. 12a**

An equipped saint has all the equipment he needs to be a saint.

Knowledge and community are our equipment  
And the fivefold ministry is the chief means God uses to gather His people together and strengthen them for doing the work of ministry.

##### **2. Every Member Ministers, v. 12b**

Virtually anything you do to help people see Christ or become like Christ is a task of ministry.

Think of the Good Samaritan, ministering to the injured Jew  
You need to be ministering, wherever you go and whatever you do, especially in the body.

The church is not built by charismatic leaders who do everything while the sheeple cut them checks. No. The church is built by everyone just as your body is built by every cell.

### **B. The Result of Bodybuilding in the Church: The Body Is Edified, v. 12c**

If you are equipped to teach the truth, teach it. If you are equipped to pick up bulletins, pick them up. If you are equipped to hand a hymnal to a visitor, hand it over. If you are mentally and physically disabled and can't do any of those things, then your ministry in the church is to accept the gifts of love and care that your fellow members lavish on you because you show them Christ.

You can and should expect the person in the pew next to you to be like family — to act like an adopted son of God Himself. That means you need to choose to act like Christ.

### **C. The Goal of Bodybuilding in the Church, vv. 13-14**

We need every-member ministry for all four of these things

#### **1. Unity of Faith**

This means believing the same things

#### **2. Knowledge of God's Son**

It takes all the saints together to know Him in all His aspects — the disabled child, the suffering sister, the brilliant theologian, the God-anointed magistrate, the couple who lost their son

#### **3. Mature Manhood**

How tall is Christ's fullness? It can't be measured in meters or miles. It can only be measured by the glory of Heaven. That's how tall the church will have to be

#### **4. Doctrinal settledness**

#### **5. Not Walking the Counsel of the Wicked**

### **D. The Habits of Bodybuilding in the Church, vv. 15-16**

#### **1. Telling the truth lovingly**

The pedant wants to make sure all his facts are correct because he likes correcting people. But the one who speaks the truth in love cares about people enough to give them correct facts.

#### **2. Connecting with the body**

The growing power of the church body comes from the connections between believers.

#### **3. Loving each other**

Every-member ministry won't happen when you just think, "Oh, I've gotta go minister to those church people some more." If that's your attitude, then you will wash out of ministry really soon. Every-member ministry can only be sustained by knowing the Christ who descended and ascended in order to give you every spiritual blessing.

## **III. Ascension Drives Maturity**

### **A. Growth and Bodybuilding Comes Only from Jesus' Work**

### **B. Our Ministry Work Is Necessary**

### **C. Our Ministry Work Is Powered by Jesus' Royal Grace**

We will see this in more detail next week as we look at Matt 18 and Jesus' steely insistence that you must forgive anyone who sins against you.

Our work in ministry is not powered by *sola bootstrapia* or by just trying harder. It is powered by loving and delighting in the grace of Jesus Christ who forgave us everything and welcomed us as His children. We aren't sharing our love and the good news of us; we are sharing His love and the good news of His Son. That, in turn, is all powered by His decent to earth and Hades in death and then by His ascent to the Father's right hand.

He knows it all, He's conquered it all, He rules it all. That's where your power and ability to love one another comes from. Amen.