

# Unity in the Body of Christ

## Growing Up

*Ephesians 4:15-16*

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# Growing Up

## Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons in Ephesians 4:1-16 that I am calling, “Unity in the Body of Christ.”

In this section of Scripture, the Apostle Paul has been teaching the church to maintain unity, to use their spiritual gifts, and to grow in spiritual maturity. In other words, he has been teaching them how Christ grows his church. Today we shall conclude the section on how Christ grows his church.

Let’s read about how Christ grows his church in Ephesians 4:7-16, although our text for today is Ephesians 4:15-16:

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of  
captives,  
and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> **Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into**

**him who is the head, into Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**  
(Ephesians 4:15-16)

## **Introduction**

Someone once said, “The church is not a gallery where we exhibit the finest of Christians. No, it is a school where we educate and encourage imperfect Christians.”<sup>1</sup> Christians in the church of Jesus Christ are at all levels of spiritual maturity. Some have just been born again, and they are babes in Christ. Others have been Christians for a relatively short time, and they are growing fast. Others have been Christians for decades, and some of them are still babes in Christ. The goal for every Christian, however, is to grow in spiritual maturity, or, as Paul put it in Ephesians 4:15, “to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

Today, I want to conclude our teaching in Ephesians 4:7-16 about how Christ grows his church. But, before we get into today’s lesson, let’s briefly review what we covered last time.

## **Review**

Ephesians 4:7-16 teaches us how Christ grows his church. Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Foundation for Church Growth Is Gifted Membership (4:7-10)

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<sup>1</sup> Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching: Over 1500 Sermon Illustrations Arranged by Topic and Indexed Exhaustively*, Revised edition of: The expositor’s illustration file. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

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2. The Essential for Church Growth Is Gifted Leadership (4:11)
3. The Means of Church Growth Is Ministry (4:12a)
4. The Goal of Church Growth Is Maturity (4:12b-14)

### I. **The Foundation for Church Growth Is Gifted Membership (4:7-10)**

First, the foundation for church growth is gifted membership.

Paul said in verse 7, **“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”** The word **“grace”** in this verse does not refer to “saving grace” but rather to “service grace.” That is, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has been given a spiritual gift by the Lord Jesus Christ for the purpose of being used in the church.

I read a story that during Vacation Bible School one year, a pastor’s wife had an experience with her primary class that can teach us all a great lesson. About an hour before dismissal one day, a new student was brought into the room. The little boy had one arm missing, and since the class was almost over, the teacher had no opportunity to learn the details of his situation, but she was nervous that one of the other children would say something insensitive to him, so she proceeded cautiously with the lesson.

As the class time came to a close, she asked the children to join her in their usual closing ceremony. “Let’s make our churches,” she said, putting her hands together to form the “church.”

“Here’s the church and here’s the steeple, open the doors and...” Suddenly the awful truth struck her. The very thing she had feared that the children would do, she had done.

As she stood there speechless, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over with her left hand and placed it up to his right hand and said, “Josh, let’s make the church together.”<sup>2</sup>

Josh needed someone to help him do what he could not do for himself. And it is just so in every church. Jesus gives spiritual gifts to every believer that must be used so that Jesus can grow his church.

So, the foundation for church growth is gifted membership.

## II. The Essential for Church Growth Is Gifted Leadership (4:11)

Second, the essential for church growth is gifted leadership.

Paul said in verse 11, **“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.”** Paul said that Christ gave a number of gifted leaders to grow his church. **The apostles and prophets** were Christ’s foundational gifts to his church. Now that we have the written Word of God, we no longer need **apostles and prophets**.

However, today Christ still gives **evangelists and shepherds and teachers** to grow his church. Their task is to teach the Word of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints.

Let us never take for granted that Christ gives gifted leaders who faithfully teach the Word of God to grow his church.

So, first, the foundation for church growth is gifted membership. Second, the essential for church growth is gifted leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 123.

### III. The Means of Church Growth Is Ministry (4:12a)

Third, the means of church growth is ministry.

In verse 12a Paul stated why Christ gave gifted leadership to the church: **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry.”** Christ grows his church by having the gifted leadership **equip the saints for the work of ministry.** The task of the evangelists and shepherds and teachers is to help each church member find a place of ministry in the church of Jesus Christ.

In September 2006 *Larkness.com* had the following headline, “Mega-Church Downsizes, Cuts Non-Essential Members.” Here is the report:

Julie and Bob Clark were stunned to receive a letter from their church in July asking them to “participate in the life of the church” or worship elsewhere. “They basically called us freeloaders,” says Julie Clark. “We *were* freeloaders,” says Bob Clark.

In a trend that may signal rough times for wallflower Christians, megachurch Faith Community of Winston-Salem has asked “non-participating members” to stop attending. “No more Mr. Nice Church,” says the executive pastor, newly hired from Cingular Wireless. “Bigger is not always better. Providing free services indefinitely to complacent Christians is not our mission.”

Freeloading Christians were straining the church’s nursery and facility resources and harming the church’s ability to reach the lost, says the pastor. “When your bottom line is saving souls, you get impatient with people who interfere with that goal.”

Faith Community sent polite but firm letters to families who attended church services and freebie events but never volunteered, never tithed, and did not belong to a small group

or other ministry. The church estimates that, of its 8,000 regular attendees, only half have volunteered in the past three years, and a third have never given to the church.

“Before now, we made people feel comfortable and welcome, and tried to coax them to give a little something in return,” says a staff member. “That’s changed. We’re done being the community nanny.”

Surprisingly, the move to disinvite people has drawn a positive response from men in the community who like the idea of an in-your-face church. “I thought, *A church that doesn’t allow wimps—that rocks,*” says Bob Clark, who admires the church more since they told him to get lost.<sup>3</sup>

Now, you need to know that *Larknews.com* is a satirical website. The story reported above is not true, but many a pastor wishes it were true! You see, faithful pastors pour their lives into **equip[ing] the saints for the work of ministry**. And it is disheartening when so many saints are not involved in any ministry at all.

So, how does Christ grow his church? First, he gives spiritual gifts to each one of his people. Then, second, he gives gifted leaders to his church. And third, these gifted leaders then equip his people for their different ministries.

#### IV. The Goal of Church Growth Is Maturity (4:12b-14)

Fourth, the goal of church growth is maturity.

In verses 12b-14, Paul said that Christ grows his church by giving gifted members and gifted leaders who each exercise their gifts so that they are active in ministry **“for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the**

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<sup>3</sup> Craig Brian Larson and Phyllis Ten Elshof, *1001 Illustrations That Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), 32.

**faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”** In a word, Christ’s goal for his church is *maturity*.

When geese migrate they can be seen flying in a V-shaped formation. While to us on the ground it is a thing of beauty, to the geese it is an essential for survival. If you watch them, you will observe that at certain intervals, relative to the strength of the head wind, the lead bird—who was doing the most work by breaking the force of wind—will drop off and fly at the end of the formation.

The reason for this is that the V-formation is much more efficient than flying loose; up to 60 percent less work is required! It has been discovered that the flapping wings create an uplift of air, an effect that is greater at the rear of the formation. So the geese take turns “uplifting” one another. By cooperating—working together—the geese can achieve long migrations that would otherwise be exceedingly difficult for the strongest and deadly for the others.

In a similar way, when believers all work together—when they pray for one another, share material needs with one another, care for one another in tangible ways, share the gospel with unbelievers, and so on—they can go so much further than if they attempt their spiritual pilgrimage alone.<sup>4</sup>

So, first, the foundation for church growth is gifted membership. Second, the essential for church growth is gifted leadership. Third, the means of church growth is ministry. And,

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<sup>4</sup> Michael P. Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching: Over 1500 Sermon Illustrations Arranged by Topic and Indexed Exhaustively*, Revised edition of: The expositor’s illustration file. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

fourth, the goal of church growth is maturity.

## Lesson

In today's lesson, in Ephesians 4:15-16 we learn one final way how Christ grows his church. We learn:

5. The Manner of Church Growth Is Speaking the Truth in Love (4:15-16)

### V. The Manner of Church Growth Is Speaking the Truth in Love (4:15-16)

And fifth, the manner of church growth is speaking the truth in love.

Paul said in verses 15-16, **“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”** The manner, or way, Christ grows his church is by all his people **“speaking the truth in love.”** In the Greek text, the expression is literally, “truthing in love.” As Kent Hughes says, “This carries the idea of not only speaking the truth but doing it.”<sup>5</sup> And John MacArthur notes:

The spiritually equipped church, whose members are sound in doctrine and mature in their thinking and living, is a church that will reach out in **love** to proclaim the saving gospel. God does not give us knowledge, understanding, gifts,

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 136.

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and maturity to keep but to share. He does not equip us to stagnate but to serve. We are not gifted and edified in order to be complacent and self-satisfied but in order to do the Lord's work of service in building up and expanding the Body of Christ. **In love** is the attitude in which we evangelize (cf. 3:17–19; 4:2; 5:1–2).<sup>6</sup>

John Stott explains **“speaking the truth in love”** this way:

Literally, it means, “truthing (*alētheuontes*) in love,” and includes the notions of “maintaining,” “living” and “doing” the truth. Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God's revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself “the Spirit of truth,” and his first fruit is “love.” There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity.<sup>7</sup>

So, first, the foundation for church growth is gifted mem-

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<sup>6</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 159.

<sup>7</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 172.

bership. Second, the essential for church growth is gifted leadership. Third, the means of church growth is ministry. Fourth, the goal of church growth is maturity. And finally, the manner of church growth is speaking the truth in love.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of church growth in Ephesians 4:15-16, let us speak the truth in love.

When a woman is pregnant, over time, it's going to show. Early on, it may not be clear to others. However, there will be things happening inside of her—changes hormonally, changes with regard to taste, and changes with regard to various habits. And as these changes are happening inside of her, eventually they are going to show up outside of her too.<sup>8</sup>

When you become a Christian, you change radically on the inside. You now have a new nature, and you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. These changes must be seen on the outside too. They will inevitably show up as you speak the truth in love to fellow believers and also to unbelievers.

Brothers and sisters, Christ is growing his church. He is growing his church all around the world. And he is growing his church here at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church too.

Christ has given you a spiritual gift. He has given this church gifted leaders. He wants every one of you to be involved in a ministry in this church. His goal is to make you spiritually mature. And the way he grows his church is through his people speaking the truth in love. May God be glorified as Christ grows his church here in New Tampa. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 196.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
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