

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/8/91  
Ephesians 4:13-16 "The Marks of a Mature Christian"

Intro (of service): Theme--Maturity

Intro (of message): Growth Chart on the wall in our kitchen. Children love to see how much they've grown! "Uncle Jack, how much have I grown since I was here last summer?" Physical growth is easy to see. He simply placed a mark on the wall, and compared it to last year's mark.

Q: How much have you grown spiritually in the past year?

Q: How can you tell if you are growing spiritually?

Q: What are the marks of a mature Christian?

Those are critical questions. Why?

God's goal for us is maturity. . .

Rom 8:29 "For whom He did foreknow. .to be conformed to the image of Son."

Col 1:28 "that I may present every man perfect (mature) in Christ"

James 1:4 "But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect"

II Pt 3:18 "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior"

God does not save a person to be status quo and static. But to mature.

Problem: One of the great enemies in the church today is COMPLACENCY. A lack of all out commitment to Jesus Christ. Complacency stifles growth. . .

Illust: Heb 5:11-14 "For by this time ye ought to be teachers"

Q: Where can we turn to find out about the marks of maturity? Eph 4

Two weeks ago: Unity (1-6)

Last week: Ministry (7-12)

Ministry involves 2 components--gifts (7-11), and growth (12). Jesus Christ gave His church grace gifts. To every believer. Some have speaking gifts, while some have serving gifts. What does God want us to do with these gifts? Use them! And what will happen? The church will grow! In fact, God gives us the Master Plan for church growth in vv 11-12. Three steps: Leaders equip. Saints minister. And the church grows.

But ministry is not the ultimate goal. What is?

This week: Maturity (13-16)

Our ultimate goal in the church is edification, not ministry. Maturity. Ministry is an intermediate goal, a means to an end.

Review: Ephesians

--written by Paul while in prison in Rome

--received by a 10-year old church he started in Asia Minor

--Purpose of letter: to inform them of their RICHES and RESPONSIBILITIES in Jesus Christ (see 1:3, and 4:1)

Eph 4:13-16 is a first century Health Manual for the church. In this section, the apostle is describing the marks of a healthy church. It's loaded with references to the human body which illustrate truths relevant to the Body of Christ, the church. Words like: "Measure. Stature. Fullness. Grow up. Head. Body. Joint. Maketh increase." The passage before us answers this critical question. . .

Q: What are the marks of a mature church?

Illust: Jen in Med School. 1st year--Study the healthy body, so you'll know how the Body is supposed to be. 2nd year--study the diseased body, so you'll see how the body is in reality. The malfunctions, the problems. Eph 4 is like the 1st year--Paul is teaching us about the Healthy Body of Christ (how it's supposed to operate). In other places he deals with the diseased body:

--I Corinthians (the disease of division)

--Galatians (disease of legalism)

--Colossians (disease of Mysticism, New Age philosophy)

Two years ago, we studied Eph 4 in our study of spiritual gifts. We saw 4 marks in vv 13-16. A Mature church is a:

1. A Grasping Church (13)
2. A Grounded Church (14)

3. A Growing Church (15)
4. A Goal-oriented Church (16).

This morning let's approach the text from a different perspective. It's one thing to talk about a mature church. But Churches are made up of what? Christians. Individuals.

Q: What does God say are the marks of a mature Christian?

Proposition: Ephesians 4:13-16 provides us with 7 marks of a mature Christian.

- I. Lives in Harmony with other believers (13)
- II. Has a Growing Knowledge of Christ (13)
- III. Christlike in Character (13)
- IV. Doctrinal Stability (14)
- V. Maintains Solid Relationships (15)
- VI. Personally Involved in the Ministry of the Church (16)
- VII. Works well with other Christians in ministry (16)

Challenge: Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 indicating "maturity needed" and 5 indicating "maturity demonstrated"). And then ask someone else to rate you in these areas. And then, by God's help, work on the areas that need improvement.

I. Lives in Harmony with other believers (13)

V 13 "Till we all come in (lit. INTO) the unity of the faith"

The first mark of maturity in a person's life is the ability to live in harmony with other believers. Christians are not lone rangers. We need each other.

Note: Look at Gal 5:19-21. Out of the 15 works of the flesh, 7 deal with problems with the Unity (hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, factions (selfish ambitions), seditions (dissensions), envy.

Listen to what our health manual is saying to us. If a church does not have unity of the faith, it is a diseased church. If a Christian does not live in harmony with other believers, he/she is not a healthy, mature Christian.

Unity needs to be both attained and maintained (see v 3).

Illust:

Q: What is it that unites us and gives us harmony?

A: Not sentiment. Not feeling. What?

V 13 "unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God"

The faith. What's that? The NT truth concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Fundamentals.

Tran: Mark #1 of a mature Christian--Lives in Harmony with other believers.

II. Has a Growing Knowledge of Christ (13)

V 13 "Till we all come. .the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man"

"Till"--the word acts like a spotlight in the night sky; it focuses our eyes on the goal. Vv 11-12 tell us, Leaders equip. Saints minister. But how long? V 13--"Until". Until what?

"All" (not some!)--Until all of us in the church have come to know Christ.

You say, "Well I'm a Christian. I already know Christ. So this doesn't apply to me, right?" Remember what Paul told the Ephesians in 1:15-17? Two things: First, he thanked God for them because they knew Christ (15). And second, he prayed for them that God would enable them to know Him better (17)!

Q: Are you growing in your knowledge of Christ?

If you're not growing, you're stagnating.

You say, "How can I know if I am growing in my knowledge of Christ?"

1. Is getting to know Christ better a priority in your life?

Is it? Even for many who call themselves Christians, it is not. . .

2. Do you set aside time consistently for your own personal study of God's Word? For prayer? For Scripture memory?

Illust:

Tran: We've seen 2 marks of a mature Christian--Lives in Harmony with other believers. Has a Growing Knowledge of Christ. Third. . .

### III. Christlike in Character (13)

V 13 "Unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"

Listen carefully. Contrary to New Age teaching, we are NOT divine. And Paul is NOT teaching here that we can become God. What is he saying? This--Christ is our standard. We are to be like Him. We are to allow Him to live in us, and through us. We are to cooperate with His Spirit who desires to produce the fruit of Christ's character in us.

5:9 "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, etc

Gal 5:22 "The fruit of the Spirit is . . ."

Note: The phrase "perfect man" in v 13 describes a person that is fully developed, robust, and mature. Remember, according to the context, Paul is discussing the church corporately, not individual Christians. The point is this. Maturity is the goal for every member of this church.

Do you know what Paul is saying to us? As a church, we need not pray for more people until we are faithfully nurturing and developing those God has already sent us!

Q: How much do you resemble Jesus Christ?

He was loving and selfless and kind? Are you? He was committed to doing the will of God no matter what the cost? Are you? He invested His life for the Kingdom? Are you?

Illust:

Tran: We've seen 3 marks of a mature Christian--Lives in Harmony with other believers. Has a Growing Knowledge of Christ. Christlike in character.

### IV. Doctrinal Stability (14)

V 14 tells us what we are NOT to be like. What's that?

V 14 "That we henceforth be no more children. . ."

Children. The greek word refers to a very young child. What are children like? They have a short attention span. They also are easily influenced. They tend to be fickle and finicky. They vasculate. They're naive. They'll believe just about anything. That's kids.

Illust:

Kids aren't the only ones like that. So too are immature Christians. They follow after Christian fads and fashions. They run after the latest teacher. And they're gullible and susceptible. Unfaithful. Undependable. And in serious danger of falling prey to doctrinal deviation.

Listen to Paul's description of the danger. . .

"tossed to and fro"--comes from the greek word for "rough water, surf".

Paul was an experienced sea traveler. He'd seen firsthand the effect powerful waves could have on a boat. Knocking it back and forth.

So it is with immature Christians. They don't know the Word of God well enough to state their convictions. They stand for the latest preacher they heard. Or book they read. They're easy prey for what. . .

"every wind of doctrine"

"sleight of men"

"cunning craftiness. . . deceive"

Illust: The crowd at Lystra in Acts 14. One minute they hailed Paul and Barnabus as "gods" (11). The next they stoned Paul (19).

A mark of maturity is doctrinal stability. Now lest you think, "Well I'm OK in this area. I'm not about to follow some cult. . ." Let me ask you 2 questions which you must be able to answer "yes" if you are doctrinally stable.

1. Can you recognize doctrinal error when you hear or read it?

2. Can you defend the truth with biblical references?

To be honest, many can't. Even those who've attended church for 25 years.

. . .

Illust:

Tran: Mark #5. . .

V. Maintains Solid Relationships (15)

V 15 "But speaking the truth in love. . ."

Does your Sunday Christianity make any difference Mon thru Satur? It does if you are spiritually mature. In what way? If you're spiritually mature, you'll maintain solid relationships with people.

Q: What are the ingredients of solid relationships?

A: Paul mentions 2 guidelines.

1. Solid relationships are characterized by integrity.

V 15 "But speaking the truth in love"--lit "truthing in love"; Live the truth in love. Live a life of integrity.

Q: Are you known as a person of integrity?

2. Solid relationships are characterized by love.

V 15 "Speaking the truth in love"

Both truth and love are necessary. Balance is critical. It's been said, "Truth w/o love is brutality. Love w/o truth is hypocrisy."

Prov 27:6 "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

God's Goal for us: To produce people that resemble Jesus Christ

V 15b "may grow up in Him in all things. . ."

Illust:

Tran: 5 marks--Lives in Harmony with other believers. Has a Growing Knowledge of Christ. Christlike in Character (13). Doctrinal Stability (14). Maintains Solid Relationships (15). #6. . .

VI. Personally Involved in the Ministry of the Church (16)

One of Paul's good friends was a physician. That man was with Paul when he wrote Ephesians from Rome, acc to Col 4:14. His name? Luke. And apparently Luke helped Paul illustrate spiritual truth by using medical terms.

What was Paul's favorite metaphor for the church? Over and over Paul says the church is like a what? A Body. And here he uses the body to reveal the 6th mark of maturity.

V 16 "From whom the whole body. . . by that which every joint supplies"

Every joint is vital in the body. Every member is necessary. From the toes to the head. The health of the body depends on the health of its parts. So it is in the church.

"EVERY joint supplies"

"the effectual working of . . . EVERY part"

Q: Are you involved in a ministry in this church?

Are you? Many are. Some used to be, but are not now. Some never have.

Illust:

Tran: But being involved in ministry alone is not enough. Notice mark #7.

VII. Works well with other Christians in ministry (16)

V 16 "fitly joined TOGETHER. . . maketh increase of the BODY unto edifying"

Some Christians are involved in ministry, but they do so with wrong motive. They don't know how to work well with other Christians. They function as if the Body existed for them. They don't understand the teamwork involved in ministry.

Eg: Phil 4:2-3 "I plead with Euodia and Synteché . . . same mind"

Illust: Someone says, "Hey, I'm involved in ministry. . . What more could you want?"

Q: Are you building up the body? It's possible to be an immature, yet involved in ministry.

Problem: Some active ministers tear down more than they build up. You say, "How can that be? Aren't they involved in the church? Yes. Well, don't they perform a needed ministry in the church? Yes. Do they please God in their ministry?" No. Why not?

I Cor 3:9-10 "Let every man take heed how he builds. . ."

Conclusion:

We've seen 7 marks of a mature Christian.

What % of those here today meet this criteria? 50%? 40%?

Key: The goal is NOT. . .

For ALL of us to meet SOME of the marks. . . , or

For SOME of us to meet ALL of the marks. . . , but

For ALL of us to meet ALL of the marks.

That's the goal. That's God's design. That's my prayer.

Q: Are you a mature Christian? We've seen God's standard for measuring maturity. Where do you stand?

Illust:

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