

### ‘Church, Every Member Matters’.

A Christian has been stranded on a desert island by himself for many years. One day he finally gets rescued by a passing ship. The captain of the ship asked him why he built three buildings on the island. To which the man replied, ‘that one is my house, that’s the church that I go to and that’s the one I used to go to’.

In **Ephesians 4:1-6**, the apostle Paul has just finished writing about unity, where he informs us that unity isn’t only about believing in the same thing, but about the way we act towards one another. He reminds us of the importance of oneness, oneness with one another and oneness with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit.

And today he’s going to remind us that there can even be oneness when there is diversity.

**Ephesians 4:7** ‘But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.’ Now in the text it’s important for us to understand that the word ‘grace’ used here, means gifted. In other words, Paul is saying that there is unity in diversity, and although some people are more gifted than others, we are still one.

It doesn’t matter if you preach or welcome people as they enter our building, we are still one. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been a Christian for one day or sixty years, we are still one. We’re all different and we have different gifts and although were different, and have different gifts, we’re still one.

In **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** Paul says that some Christians may be more gifted than others, but the more gifts we have, the more responsibility we have to utilise those gifts. He says, there is one body but many parts and we are all sustained by the one Spirit. In other words, although members may look different, they all work together as one body.

**Have you ever witnessed someone falling to the ground?** When you watch someone falling down, you will notice that they usually stretch out their hands to protect the rest of their body. That’s how the body, the church, is supposed to function and every member of the body should be concerned about the well-being of the whole body.

If your child decided to leave home and says they don’t want to live with you anymore, **would you be concerned as a parent?** I would imagine that you would be heart broken and I’m sure you would go out of your way to find out if they were ok and what the problem was. **Then why wouldn’t it be just as important when members of this body decide to leave and say they’re not coming back? Why we wouldn’t want to listen to members who have concerns about the body?** If one part of the body suffers, then the whole body should suffer too.

Now notice that Paul says, **Ephesians 4:7** ‘to each one of us grace has been given’, this means that’s there’s not a Christian in this room that God hasn’t given a gift too.

And let me say this, I often here Christians say, ‘**they’re simply not talented, I’m not really good at anything**’. **Do you understand what they are saying?** They are saying that God hasn’t enabled them to do anything. Listen church, God has blessed every single member of this congregation with an ability of some kind to use within His body.

**Romans 12:3-5** ‘For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.’

When I look around at this congregation, I see people utilising their gifts but I also see people just sitting on their gifts. I’ve seen churches where some members think their gift is far more important than other member’s gifts. I’ve seen churches where some people think they are gifted in certain areas and its quite clear they aren’t. But Paul says, all people are important, all of us have gifts, and nobody should feel less important. And if you’re thinking, ‘**I just don’t have any gifts**’, then let me encourage you to think again because God says otherwise.

Notice that Paul also says in **Ephesians 4:7**, that it is ‘**Jesus who gives the gifts**’, not the Holy Spirit. This tells us that these gifts given to us by Christ, weren’t miraculous gifts. And we must understand that not all gifts from God were miraculous in nature.

The Message translation says this in **Romans 12:6-8** ‘If you preach, just preach God’s Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don’t take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don’t get bossy; if you’re put in charge, don’t manipulate; if you’re called to give aid to people in distress, keep

your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.'

Has God given you the gift of preaching or teaching? Then use it. Has God given you the gift of helping others within the body or helping those who are in need? Then use it. Has God given you the gift of encouraging and guiding people? Then use it. Has God given you the gift of leading people? Then use it.

You see we all have different gifts but those gifts must be used and not buried. You remember what Jesus told the one talented man who never used his talent. **Matthew 25:30** 'Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

God says, 'do you know what's hurting my kingdom, what's hurting my kingdom is all the one talent people who aren't serving and using that talent.' Jesus says we must use the gifts He has given us, no matter how big or small we think that gift is. Isn't it amazing what God can do with just a few loafs and just a few fishes if they are given to Him? Isn't it amazing what God can do with just a cup of cold water if they are given to Him?

**Ephesians 4:8-10** 'This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)'

When we read Paul's words here, we have to imagine a Roman triumph, a great procession entering Rome led by a victorious king, returning from a great war, riding on a white horse. At the back of him, there is train of people, those who have been taken captive during the war and all the spoils the victorious king has gained and now brings with them. As the procession goes along, he gives gifts to men, some captives were set free, whilst others were executed. This is a picture of the victorious Christ who gave gifts to His people.

And notice that Paul quotes from **Psalm 68:18** 'When you ascended on high, you took many captives; you received gifts from people, even from the rebellious—that you, LORD God, might dwell there.' Here we have a picture of David prophetically looking forward into the future. But notice David says, 'received gifts' but Paul says, 'gave gifts'. In other words, David is looking forward and Paul looking at the fulfilment of this passage.

Now you might ask, **well who are the captives?** From the Psalm it's clear that they were the enemies of Israel who were defeated when Jerusalem was captured. In Ephesians the captives are the enemies of Christ, namely, Satan, sin, and death. In other words, Christ had victory over Satan, sin and death and gives gifts to those who have been identified with Him.

Now there are some who come to this text and teach that Christ descending to hell. But the text doesn't say that, in fact Paul doesn't even mention the word, 'hell'. He speaks about Christ 'descending to the lower, earthly regions', which is a reference to Christ's birth. We find David using similar language in **Psalm 139:15**, where he writes, 'My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.'

In other words, Paul is referring to Christ's coming to earth as a baby, he's speaking about Christ coming into Mary's womb. Paul is saying that Jesus, who went up to heaven, that is in His ascension, is the same Jesus, who earlier came down from heaven. He isn't speaking about Christ going to 'hell', he's speaking about Christ's human birth.

**So what are the gifts that Christ gave His church?** **Ephesians 4:11** 'So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.' Paul says here is a list of the gifts Christ gave and later we will see the reason for the gifts given.

The apostles were apostles of Christ, and to be an apostle you needed to be someone who was continuously with Jesus, called by Jesus and be a witness of the resurrection of Jesus. The prophets mentioned here were inspired preachers and teachers who ministered to local disciples in order to instruct them in the Word of God.

Remember there was no written Bibles back then as we have today and so these prophets were given the task of reminding the church of the truth that was revealed through the Christ-sent apostles. The word 'evangelist' is found only three times in Scripture and from those verses we learn that they were preachers who travelled about preaching the Gospel to the lost. They preached the Good News to anyone who hadn't heard it before.

A pastor is the same as an elder, bishop, overseer or shepherd and these words are not titles but merely a description of their role within the local church. And as we know if anyone man aspired to be an elder, they had to meet certain qualifications. Basically they acted as the spiritual leaders of the church.

Teachers function today in a similar way to the prophets, however, their source for edification of the church comes from God's Word, not a direct revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever watched Formula one racing? Have you ever seen what happens when that racing cars pulls into the pit stop during the race? When that car pulls into the pit stop, it has four new tyres put on it, the petrol tank is filled, the windshield is washed, the driver is given a drink and other adjustments to the car is made.

And they do all of that quicker than it takes me to fill my car with petrol. How come they can do all those things so quickly? They can do all these things so quickly because that team is organised and every member of that team knows exactly what their job is and they do the job right.

Paul says the body of Christ has been organised in such a way, where we have all been equipped with different gifts, so that we can work together and do the work God has for us to do. Listen loved ones, we can't all be pastors, we can't all be teachers, we can't all be evangelists. Some of us have to change the tyres, some of us need to wash the windscreen or give the driver a drink.

But all of us have jobs to do within the church and each job is just as important as the other. And if we want God's church to function the way He organised it to function, then each of us needs to do the best we can with the gifts we've got.

But what was the reason for Christ giving His church these gifts? Ephesians 4:12-13 'To equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.'

God's gift of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were given so that they could equip God's people to serve and build up His church. Today we build the church up, we edify the church, and help the saints grow by teaching God's Word. When the body is being build up well, and all the parts of the body are working together, then God's church just gets bigger and stronger.

But in all of this, we must remember that our final goal is to become mature. 1 Peter 2:2 'Like new-born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation'. The point is simply this, Christians haven't only got a duty to work in God's church, with the gifts God has given them. Christians have also got a duty to grow up and become mature.

But have you ever wondered why God wants us to grow up and become mature? Does God just want us to understand the Gospel and enjoy our salvation? Does He not want us to study things which are a little hard to understand?

When Peter writes about Paul's letters, he says in 2 Peter 3:16 'His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.'

I want you to notice something very important about this verse. Peter doesn't say that Paul's letters contain some things which are impossible to understand, he says there are some things which Paul writes about which are hard to understand.

That's why it bothers me when people say, 'oh we don't need to get deep into certain texts of the Bible because it doesn't affect our salvation!' Well yes, we do need to get deep into certain texts to help with our understanding of the Bible because the deeper we dig the stronger our faith becomes.

Hebrews 5:11-14 'We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.'

Have you given up trying to understand God's Word a little deeper? Are you quite content knowing the elementary truths about belief, repentance, confession, baptism and faithfulness?

A man got a job as an usher at a picture house; he was walking up the aisle before the film was about to start, when he came across a man lying over 4 seats in the back row, the usher went over to the man and said, 'Sir, you need to sit up and only take one seat.' But the man just moaned, so the usher said, 'Excuse me sir, you really need to sit up and if you don't, I will get the manager.' But the man still didn't move, he just lay there and moaned.

So the usher got the manager, and the manager said, 'Excuse me sir, would you please get up and only use one seat, we need these seats for paying customers.' But still, the man didn't move. So the manager said, 'OK, if you don't move I am going to phone for the Police,' but the man still didn't move. So the manager got the police and the policeman said, 'Sir, what is your name?' And the man replied, 'Tommy,' the policeman said, 'and where do you come from Tommy?' the man said, 'the balcony'.

And the moral of the story is, if people don't move it's probably because there's something wrong. Or let me put it this way, if Christians don't grow there's definitely something wrong. Paul is going to give us two reasons why it's important for Christians to grow.

### 1. Becoming mature Christians 'helps prevent faith sickness'.

Ephesians 4:14 '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.' There are many Christians today who suffer from 'Peter Pan syndrome', you know the little boy who said, 'I don't want to grow up'.

But Paul says we can't stay as children, we need to grow up from being infants and become fully matured adults. You see, our lives are like being on a ship where the weather around us is constantly changing. Any sailor will tell you that when they are at sea, the wind changes direction all the time. The waves go from being calm to becoming life threatening in the space of a few minutes and if your anything like me, you end up with sea sickness.

The point is, being a Christian and living the Christian life is far from plain sailing. And anyone who tells you to become a Christian and says, 'your life will be smooth sailing from now on, and the skies will be permanently blue', has told you a lie.

Paul says, God's Word must be our compass, our faith must be our captain, our hope must be our anchor and our knowledge and good works must be our ballast. But we must also keep watch and keep wisdom at the helm. You see, false doctrine is like the winds, they are blustery and unsteady, they come from nowhere and change all the time.

And just like the wind, these false doctrines make a deal great of noise and disturb the atmosphere. And as a result, they become very violent, spread confusion and bring about faith sickness in God's people's.

There was an accomplished artist who was applying the finishing touches to a bronze sculpture. He kept filing, scraping, and polishing every little surface of his masterpiece. Someone asked him, 'when will it be done?' 'Never', he said, 'I just keep working and working until they come and take it away.'

It's so important for us to grow up, to know the Scriptures and be on our guard against false teachers. And at the same time it's also important for us to keep working on our Christlikeness until Christ comes to take us home.

### 2. Another reason why we must grow up as Christians is because 'it helps us to become like Jesus'.

Ephesians 4:15 '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.' God wants us to become like His Son, but let me say this, this doesn't happen overnight. If anyone honestly believes that I stopped having a drink and alcohol problem the minute I became a Christian, then they're wrong. Or as someone once said, 'the acorn doesn't become an oak in a day.'

Now God understand that, He knows we will all have our struggles but as we go through those struggles, the goal is the same, to become Christlike. Romans 8:29 'For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.'

It doesn't matter if you've been a Christian for one day or fifty years, your goal is to become like Christ. And let me say this, you will have times when you fail miserably, you will have times when you look nothing like Christ. But don't let those times stop you from growing, keep praying about it, keep reading God's Word.

One of the reasons God gave us the gift of His Holy Spirit is to help us to become more like Jesus. **2 Corinthians 3:18** 'And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'

God doesn't want us to be like those false teachers who are cunning, crafty and deceitful, He wants us to speak the truth in love. **Do we really think we can help people if we don't teach them what God's Word actually says? Do we really believe we can help people understand God's Word if we're not doing so in love?**

Yes, we must defend what we believe but we must do so using love. But God not only wants us to speak the truth, He also wants us to walk in the truth.

**3 John 1:4** 'I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.'

In other words, God wants us to speak and walk as sincerely and clearly as He has revealed to us in His Word.

There was a Christian husband who sneaked upstairs into his house drunk one night. He looked in the bathroom mirror and bandaged the bumps and bruises he'd received in a fight. He then proceeded to climb into bed, smiling at the thought that he'd pulled one over on his Christian wife. When morning came, he opened his eyes and there stood his wife, who said to him, 'you were drunk last night weren't you!' 'No, honey', he said and then his wife said, 'well, if you weren't, then who put all the bandages on the bathroom mirror?'

You see loved ones, you can't claim to be a Christian if your walk isn't matching your talk. If you want to grow up and become like the head of the church, who is Christ, you can't preach one thing and practice the opposite.

Paul goes on to say in **Ephesians 4:16** '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.' Notice again how Paul emphasizes that the only way we can grow is to stay connected to the head, who is Christ. We're all wise enough to understand that a body without a head is a dead body. And Paul says we can't grow if we don't stay connected to Christ because it's from Christ that everything holds and works together.

But there's a really important point which is often overlooked in these verses. Paul says not only are the members of Christ's body dependant on Christ, they are also dependent upon each other. Think about it in physical terms, if one of your legs isn't growing properly, you will use the other leg more and it could get overloaded and worn out because it has to do twice the work it normally should do. In other words, the church here can't function properly without me, the church here can't function properly with you, every one of us needs to be doing our part.

Now let me be honest here, I see a lot of churches which are hobbling around, limping into eternity. I see people who are totally burned out, I see the same people getting involved in the activities of the church and working hard for the Lord.

But I also see other parts of the body who are quite happy for others to work twice as hard as they normally should do. Paul says when every part of the body works together to build the body up in love, we all become more and more like Christ.

Let me encourage you to help me to become more like Christ, as I encourage you to become more like Christ. Let me encourage you to help me do my part within the Lord's church, as I encourage you to do your part.