

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 1 January 2017. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Time to Grow Up!

Ephesians 4:11-16

We live in an age in which many young people simply don't want to grow up. In an article in *Answers* magazine entitled "Material Signs of Maturity," the author, R. Albert Mohler, made the following observation about the immaturity of young men today:

"[The Biblical] portrait of manhood is not popular with modern advertisers and marketers. They know where to aim their messages—at adolescent boys and young men who are enamoured with popular entertainment, sporting events, and material goods. The media extol economic carelessness, self-centredness, and laziness as the standard of young manhood.....A real man, in contrast, knows how to hold a job, handles money with responsibility, and if married, takes care of the needs of his wife and family. Failure to develop economic maturity leads to young men who float from job to job and take years to 'find themselves' in terms of...vocation."

Now, maybe you are applauding those words. It is not hard to see that most teens, 20-somethings, and 30-somethings of today are frightfully immature, in every conceivable way. Probably as never before in history, people are wandering into physical adulthood, and are continuing through physical adulthood, in a kind of perpetual childhood, detached from reality, and failing to develop emotional stability. However, I have this sobering observation to make: A great number of the churches of Jesus Christ in our day are suffering from a lack of *spiritual* maturity—an unwillingness to grow up, and to follow the holy vocation to which their Heavenly Father has called us. Many churches, as a body, are lazy, carnal, and seemingly trapped in spiritual infancy. This is grievous to the Lord.

We are at the start of a new year. At this time of year, people often focus on making "new year's resolutions." I am not here to propose that we make "new year's resolutions," because our resolutions should not be based upon the fact that a new calendar date has rolled over. I *am* here to propose that as Christians, we need to submit ourselves to the Lord *every* day of the year, perennially—not only in our individual lives, but as a *body*. When I say "body," I am talking about "the assembly"—the church.

Christian, my message this morning is exclusively for you. If you are saved, but have not joined the membership of a biblical church, you are going to be challenged about it this morning. The church is the Lord's precious possession; and it is vitally important that you be part of it. And if you *have* joined the membership of this church (or another biblical church), you need to know what the Lord's *plan* is for His church. You also need to know what your *part* in the church is.

The title of this morning's message is ***Time to Grow Up!***

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

I. The teachers and the students (vv. 11-12)

Before we go far in this passage of Scripture, I want to pause for a few moments and talk about the offices of church leadership that are listed in **verse 11**. It is important to realise that

the first two offices listed here (“apostle” and “prophet”), do not exist today. This is important to understand, because when you turn on your T.V., you will come across people who claim to be an “apostles” or “prophets.” Do not heed what they say! Their so-called “revelations” or “prophecies” are not true revelations: they are their own imaginings. Let’s see what the Bible says about the qualifications for Apostles.

Read Luke 6:12-13

Read Acts 1:15-26

According to these passages, the requirements for being one of the twelve Apostles were: 1. That the man had been *personally* chosen to be an Apostle by Christ Himself; 2. That he had been baptised by John the Baptist; 3. That he had been with Christ during His ministry on earth; and 4. That he had *personally* seen Christ after His resurrection, so that he could testify that Christ is risen. Now, Matthias (the one who replaced Judas Iscariot) was a little different from the other eleven. He had been baptised by John, and he had been with Christ while He was on earth, and he had seen Christ after His resurrection; but he had not been *chosen* by Christ while he was on earth. However, he *was* chosen by the Holy Spirit just after Christ’s ascension back to heaven; and it was the *original eleven Apostles* who prayed over him, and sought God’s direction as to who should fill the office. Can modern-day “apostles” meet these requirements? No, they can’t.

But wait! Weren’t there Apostles other than the original twelve? Yes, there were. Were all of these other Apostles with Jesus throughout His earthly ministry? No, they weren’t. Paul, in particular, was not with Christ during His earthly ministry. So, what were the requirements to be one of these other Apostles? Let’s look.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1 / 15:1-11

The requirements for the other Apostles were: 1. That they had been personally chosen by Christ; and, 2. That they had seen Christ after His resurrection. Paul was not baptised by John the Baptist, and he was not even a believer during Christ’s earthly ministry; but he *was* chosen by Christ, and he *did* see Christ after his resurrection. Now, all the other Apostles saw Christ during the 40 days between His resurrection and His ascension; but Paul did not, because he was not a believer yet. However, Christ personally appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, saved him by His grace, and then informed him that He had chosen him to be an Apostle to the Gentiles. Now, this was irregular, since all the other Apostles had seen Christ either before or after His resurrection, before He went back to heaven; and Paul humbly acknowledged this. This is why Paul referred to himself as an Apostle that was **“born out of due time.”** Yet, God did choose Paul; and all the other Apostles acknowledged that God had chosen him. You’ll notice, though, that there is a statement of *finality* about Paul’s Apostleship. He says that **“last of all he was seen of me also.”** Paul was the last Apostle. That means that there are no other Apostles being chosen today. No one can meet the qualifications of having been chosen *personally* by Christ, or of having seen Christ after His resurrection.

In **Ephesians 2:19-20**, the Apostle Paul said that the church is **“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”** The Apostles and prophets laid the *foundation* for the institution of the local church, in that they gave the revelations which are now written down in Scripture. All the information that the churches need in order to follow God’s will has been written down

in this Book. Now that the foundation for the churches has been laid, is there any more need for the offices of “Apostle” and “prophet”? No, there is not. Let’s see what Paul said about it.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-12

In this passage, Paul said that prophecies, tongues-speaking, and new revelations (“knowledge”) would “*cease*” when “*that which is perfect*” was come. So the question is, What is “*that which is perfect*”? It is the Word of God—the canon of Scripture! How do I know? Because Paul went on to say, “*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.*” In **2 Corinthians 3:18** and **James 1:22-25**, this same “glass” analogy is used; and it clearly refers to the *Scriptures*. God’s Word is like a “glass,” or mirror, because it shows us what we really look like, according to God; and it also reveals *Christ’s* image to us, so that we may be *conformed* to His image. So, what Paul was saying was that *at that present time*, they saw through the “glass” of God’s Word only dimly, because the Scriptures were not yet complete. When the Scriptures would be complete, there would be no more need for new revelations, because all the revelation we need would be found in the Scriptures. When the Scripture would be complete, new prophecies, tongues-speaking, and new revelations would stop altogether. This means that the office of “prophet” would cease, as well!

At the very end of the last book of the Bible, in A.D. 95, God closed the canon of Scripture with these words: “*If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*” (**Revelation 22:18-19**). That is a sober warning, my friends. Anyone who attempts to add to the revelation of this Book by giving a “new prophecy” is in serious trouble with God! There are no more Apostles, or prophets. The Scripture has been completed; and it has all that we need to live godly in Christ Jesus. The offices of evangelist, pastor, and teacher have been left for the instruction of the churches today. Those whom God calls to these offices do not give *new* revelations; they *proclaim* the revelations that are written in this Book.

With this in mind, let us return to **Ephesians 4**. (**Read Ephesians 4:11-12 again.**) In **verse 12**, Paul says that God has given the offices of “pastor” and “teacher” to the “*body*” (in other words, to the local church) for the “*perfecting of the saints.*” The pastor’s job is to equip the members of the church, and to help to bring them to spiritual maturity. But that’s not the whole story. Let’s look more closely at **verse 12**. (**Read verse 12 again.**)

In this verse, the word “for” is used three times. It reads, “*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” Now, I don’t mean to get overly technical, here; but in English, there is only one preposition used in front of these three phrases—the word “for.” But in Greek, there are *two* different prepositions. The word *pro* (“for”) is used just before the phrase “*the perfecting of the saints.*” But in the rest of the verse, another preposition is used—the word *eis*. Paul says “*eis* (for) the work of the ministry, *eis* (for) the edifying of the body of Christ.” Why is this important? Because *pro* and *eis* have slightly different nuances of meaning. The word *pro* is used to introduce a *general idea*; but the word *eis* is used to introduce a much more specific idea.

Why is this so important? Because those last two phrases (*for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*) are *not* referring to the **pastors and teachers**; they are

referring back to the word “*saints*.” What this means is that the pastor’s job is to “perfect” (to equip) all the other members of the body, so that *they* can then do “*the work of the ministry*,” and so that *they* can edify the body of Christ. The pastor’s job is to *train* the rest of the body, so that *they* will be able to serve the Lord in specific capacities within the church, and build each other up in the Lord. William Tyndale (the man who made the first translation of the New Testament from Greek into English in 1538) seemed to understand what Paul was saying; and he translated this verse in such a way as to make Paul’s meaning very clear. The Tyndale version reads, “*that the saints might have all things necessary to work and minister withall, to the edifying of the body of Christ.*”

Pastors and teachers are not some elite class of men, towering over God’s people. The job of pastors and teachers is to “perfect the saints.” Their purpose is to make the members of the church spiritually equipped with the knowledge of God’s Word, so that *they* can then go out and serve God in the church, and teach each other, and build each other up.

Too many church members come every Sunday to be awe-inspired by the pastor’s preaching; but they don’t think that *they* could ever memorise Scripture, or explain its meaning to others. Folks, we need to get rid of the notion that “only the pastor can explain Scripture.” After sitting under their pastor’s preaching year after year, Christians should have ample knowledge of Scripture to be able to lead someone to the Lord! Christians who have been in church for years should be able to give godly counsel to others, from Scripture. All the saints should be able to handle the Word of God confidently, and not always have to say, “Talk with my pastor.” Church members should be able to teach doctrine to other church members. In **Colossians 3:16**, Paul wrote, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another.*” The pastor preaches and teaches, and the teachers teach, so that all the church members may be equipped to serve, and to handle the Word of God.

Read Hebrews 5:11-14

Brethren, we need to think of church, in a very real sense, as a *schoolroom*. Yes, we come to worship and praise the Lord. Yes, we come to be uplifted in the Lord, and to fellowship with other believers. *All* these things are important aspects of the purpose of the local church. But we also come to learn the Word of God, and to become equipped to teach it to others. The church is not a “one man show,” with the pastor as the star performer: it is a “*body*” which is made up of individual members. These members are to be working together to carry out the mission that Christ has given us. And this brings us to our second point.

II. The body (vv. 13-16)

(Read Ephesians 4:13-16 again.) In these verses, Paul compares the church of Ephesus to a human body. Each member of the church of Ephesus was like a member of the human body, carrying out its own important function, and working together with all the other members of the body. Paul used this “body” analogy to describe the church in many other of his letters. Let’s look at some other Scriptures, and see what we can learn about the body of Christ.

The very first truth we need to realise about Christ’s body, the church, is that it is *local and visible*. Now, this isn’t just a “hobby-horse” that Pastor Finley likes to ride on. This is a Scriptural fact. The word “church” is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means

“called-out assembly.” A church is an “assembly.” The very word “assembly” implies a local setting—a particular place where people are gathered together. In fact, “local church” is a redundant term! A church is, by its very nature, local and visible! It cannot mean anything else. Let’s examine what Paul said about the “body of Christ” in **1 Corinthians 12**.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:25-27

Paul, in writing to the church of Corinth, said, “*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*” He didn’t say, “You are *part of* the body of Christ; he said, “*ye are the body of Christ.*” The members of the church of Corinth did not belong to some kind of larger “body of Christ”; they *were* the body of Christ, in their own locale.

Unfortunately, most Christians today have swallowed the “universal church” theology—the idea that there is some kind of larger “church” out there, which is comprised of all born-again Christians. Most Christians, when they hear or read about “the church,” automatically think “all Christians in the world.” Consequently, many Christians do not see the need to join a local church: or, if they *have* joined a church, they do not see the need to be very involved in serving God within their local church. Many Christians today won’t settle down in a local church because, “After all, I am a member of the ‘larger body of Christ,’ and I’m serving God in my own way. I don’t have to be committed to a local church in order to serve the Lord.” Christian, this is completely, utterly unbiblical. There is no other church than the local, visible, assembly. Redemption Baptist Church *is* the “body of Christ” in this location. Other Bible-preaching churches around this country are “the body of Christ” in *their* locations. God wants you to be a member of a local, visible assembly, and to serve Him in that assembly!

What else do we need to know about “the body of Christ”? Well, we need to know that the head of the “body of Christ” is...*Christ!* (**Read Ephesians 4:15-16 again.**)

Jesus Christ, and no one else, is the Head of the body. He is the One who directs the growth of the body. As a pastor, I am the bishop (the *human* “overseer”) of this assembly; and I *do* confront people about being involved in areas of service. But I shouldn’t have to twist people’s arms about getting involved and finding a place of service in the local church. *Christ* is the one who *places* people in the body.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-18

When Paul says that the Lord has “*set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him,*” he is not saying merely that “the Lord has put you on the membership role of your church.” Paul is saying that the Lord had placed the church members in particular *places of service* in their church. Just as every organ in the human body has a specific function in the body, so God has specific things that He wants *every member* to do within His body, the church.

Now, just so you know, brethren, Christ isn’t going to appear to you in a blaze of glory and audibly tell you what He wants you to do in your local church! How, then, can you know what God wants you to do in the church? Well, first of all, if you have not joined a church, you need to obey the Lord and *join* a good, Biblical church, by way of biblical baptism (or by letter from another biblical church, if you have been baptised elsewhere). Then, after you’ve taken this step of obedience, *ask* your pastor how you can serve. And while you’re at it,

commit it to the Lord in prayer. Ask *Him* what He wants you to do. The Lord may show you something you can do that even the pastor hadn't thought of! Those who are willing to be empty vessels, and who sincerely ask the Lord for a place of service, will not be denied. The Lord may not put you in a big, flashy position: He may have some very "behind the scenes" work for you to do. But whatever He may have you to do, do it with all your might!

What else do we need to know about the local church? We need to know how God views "qualification" for service. Let's put it this way: The organs of a human body can do nothing without the head, right? The head is the command centre. It literally regulates the needs and supplies of all the organs of the body. That is exactly what Christ, the Head of the church, does. As members of Christ's body, we need to understand that *Christ* is the One who qualifies us for service. **(Read Ephesians 4:15-16 again.)**

Many Christians suffer from one of two wrong ideas about service to God. The first problem that some Christians have is that they *think* that they are "qualified." Because they have a certain amount of knowledge or experience, they think that they have what it takes to serve the Lord. They do not really understand that in order to serve the Lord, the enablement must come from Christ, and not from self. You can have all the knowledge and experience in the world; but if you be relying on your own "qualifications" instead of relying on the Lord, your service will come to nothing. Paul said that the members of the body need to serve the Lord "***according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.***" *Christ* is the one who does the "***effectual working***" in every church member. If we do not have His "***effectual working***" in our daily lives, then we are labouring in vain.

A second problem that many Christians have is that they *don't* think they're qualified to serve. They think that they could not possibly have a place of service in the church, because they "just aren't qualified." There are a couple problems with this line of thinking. First of all, when people say, "I'm just not qualified to serve," they usually don't *want* to serve; and their saying "I'm not qualified" is simply their excuse for not getting involved. But the problem goes even deeper than that. The other problem with people who say "I'm not qualified to serve" is that they don't really understand what it means to be "qualified."

You see, the Christian who says, "I can't serve because I'm not qualified" has it all wrong. He thinks that "qualification" means "a certain level of talent or learning." Just like the person who thinks he *is* qualified, this person does not realise that *God* is the One who equips and empowers the believer for service. God does not *call* those who are *qualified*; He *qualifies* those whom He *calls*. By the way, this applies to all of us. God has called *every* Christian to serve Him. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:1**, "***I therefore...beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.***" God has a holy calling for you in the church, Christian. But you must humbly *answer* the call. You must acknowledge that you are nothing without Him, and humbly allow Him to equip you. And while you are being equipped, find out what you can do right now, and *start serving* in whatever way you can! **(See John 15:5.)**

Before we close this morning, let's examine the *marks of maturity* that should be present in a church. **(Read Ephesians 4:13-15 again.)** Paul strongly emphasises the fact that the body is to *grow up together*. Obviously, a new Christian is not at the same place, spiritually, as one who has been walking with the Lord for 30 years; but everyone should be walking in the Lord, and growing together. Older members should be helping younger members in their growth. And what is the ultimate objective? What should a church be growing *toward*? They are

working toward ***“the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”*** “The faith” means “the whole body of truth.” In other words, God *expects* the whole church to believe the same doctrines. This is not forced uniformity, or peer pressure. This is true unity; and it is based on the fact that we have all come to the same conclusions from the Scripture, as we are being led by the Spirit. There aren’t strange doctrines floating around in the church, because all the members are grounded in the Word, and are growing together in unity.

What else does Paul say about maturity? He says that the church is to grow ***“unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”*** That word “perfect” does not mean “sinless.” It means “complete,” “equipped,” or “mature.” In other words, the whole church is to be growing together toward *maturity* (***“the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”***). Is *this* church growing up together toward maturity? Are all our members growing in the Lord together, through the enablement of the Holy Spirit? I surely hope so!

Sadly, many churches today are extremely doctrinally immature: and consequently, they are extremely carnal. Many pastors have replaced biblically-sound songs and hymns with loud, upbeat, rocky, worldly “Christian” music, so that the people will feel as though there is life and power in the place: when, in reality, there is little spiritual life or power in the place at all! The church members don’t know the Word of God, because it is largely neglected and watered down. The people are easy prey for religious con men and wolves; and many of them waste years of their lives feeding on the husks of false doctrine. Worst of all, many churches are filled with lost people who have made false professions of faith, and been accepted as members, because the Gospel was not clearly presented to them. This should not be the condition of Christ’s church! The members should *know* the true Gospel inside and out. They should be able to smell a false gospel in the same way that a bloodhound smells a fox.

In **verse 15**, we find one more mark of spiritual maturity in a church. Paul said that as Christians grow together, they should be ***“speaking the truth in love.”*** A sign of spiritual maturity is being able to tell someone a hard truth (in other words, to confront sin)—yet, to do it in a loving way. As the body of Christ grows in grace, all the members should be increasingly imitating the character of Christ. We should be developing the kind of compassion that Christ has, and the ability to speak the truth in love.

Conclusion: It is my prayer that in this new year, Redemption Baptist Church will continue to grow up together in the Lord, to the ***“measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*** To our church members, I would ask: Are you ready and willing to be equipped with God’s Word, so that you may do the work of the ministry, and edify each other in the Lord? Perhaps you are saved, but you need to obey the Lord, and be biblically baptised, so that you *can* serve the Lord in His assembly. If so, why not resolve to obey the Lord, and be scripturally baptised?

Perhaps there are some here who have never been saved. Though this message has been addressed to believers, I would not end this message without making the invitation for you to receive Christ as your personal Saviour, if you have not already. You cannot be saved by your own merit or good works. You must be born again into God’s family. You must believe on Christ alone, and trust in His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead, to wash away your sins. You must repent, and turn to Him. **(Quote Romans 10:9-10.)** Won’t you repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ this morning? He will save you!