

TIME TO GROW UP!
EPHESIANS 4:14-24
SERMON

Dustin Thompson, our Youth Director did an outstanding job preaching last week from Ephesians 4:7-12. He encouraged us to be part of Christ's church building work. We should do this because of who Christ is, for Jesus operates as head of the church and the One who gave Himself for the church out of love. Further, we should be part of Christ's church building work because of who Christ gives; He gives Himself to the church as its Great Shepherd and he gives human leaders as under-shepherds.! Finally, we should participate in Christ's church building work because of who Christ gifts, namely all of us who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In today's lesson, Paul encourages us to *grow* in our faith. He makes it clear that **Jesus provides the resources to help us grow in our faith.** Our key verses are **vs.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".**

Please turn to the middle section of your bulletin and you will see that's the major point of my message today: **Jesus provides the resources to help us grow in our faith.**

Unfortunately, some people profess faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but never really grow much in their Christian faith. They might attend worship occasionally and say a prayer when a crisis occurs in their lives but they have not *really* allowed God to help them change their habits, relationships, attitudes, or their use of time and money. They fail to make regular worship of God, reading their Bible, getting involved in serving Christ and his church a priority in their lives.

Imagine having a baby which grows up to become a child but which breast feeds for 8-9 years! Though you try very hard, you cannot seem to get your child onto eating solid food. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it, breast feeding a child in elementary school?! Have *you* grown and matured in your Christian experience or do you still act like an infant with no discernible changes or growth in your life??

Mark Offord grew up in our church. I remember working with Mark's parents, Steve and Marilyn to provide leadership for our church's Junior High group in the late 1980's. We called the group, Soul Miners and Mark and his brother Josh were members of our active group. Mark drifted from his faith as an older teen and young adult and lived life on his own terms for many years. But in the past few years Mark has decided to get serious about his Christian faith and return to making it an important part of his life. The Holy Spirit has helped Mark make changes. About a year and half ago our church Session hired Mark to serve as our part-time Director of Operations. He's been a joy to have on our staff and work with him!

Another young man who decided to take steps to grow in his Christian faith is Ryan Urton. Ryan and his family recently moved back to Oregon from Virginia. He and his wife Katie have three very young children. While in Virginia they started attending a church which then stimulated them to read the Bible and take it seriously, got involved in a Care Group in the church they attended and all this helped motivate them to get serious about their Christian faith.

Both Mark and Ryan have made a conscious choice to engage in activities which promote spiritual growth. Both of them would tell you that growing in their faith has given them much more meaning, hope and joy in their lives.

It's possible to be a confessing Christian for many, many years and remain a spiritual infant. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about their lack of spiritual maturity, which led to divisions in the church. Turn back to **1 Corinthians 3:2-3** **"I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?"**

Jealousy and strife serve as indicators of an immature faith. Would you consider yourself a mature Christian? Maybe you've been a Christian for many years but have never really progressed much in your faith. Or, perhaps when you made your profession of faith you were very enthusiastic but your passion waned rather quickly and you haven't grown much since that time. Listen: **Jesus provides the resources to help you grow in your faith!** What are these resources Jesus provides to help us grow in our faith?

1. Love for others; Jesus gives us love for our brothers and sisters in Christ! Look in your text in vs.16b **"makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love"**. Earlier, in the first part of vs.16 right after Paul refers to Christ he states **"from whom"**. Then Paul proceeds to explain how Christ holds the church together, helps it work properly and the church grows in love.

Christ functions like the brain as He sends signals to various parts of the body, making sure it works properly and grows as it should. But the church has a partnership with Christ for Paul wrote that it will **"grow so that it builds itself up in love"**. Paul changes metaphors from the human body to a building. *We* don't build up the church but we do have a unique partnership with Christ who does build the church. Note the mortar which holds the building together: love!

Turn to **John 13:34-35** **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"**.

Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? I'm not talking about having warm, fuzzy feelings towards them. Rather, do you have a deep, abiding, committed love for them? This kind of love gives sacrificially. It serves patiently. It refuses to speak evil of them or degrade them in anyway. A deep, abiding, committed love seeks the best interests for others. This kind of love protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres.

Many years ago, the renowned artist Paul Gustave Dore lost his passport while traveling in Europe. When he came to a border crossing, he explained his predicament to one of the guards. Giving his name to the official, Dore hoped he would be recognized and allowed to pass into the country. The guard however, said that many people attempted to cross the border by claiming to be persons they were not. Dore insisted that he was the man he claimed to be. "Alright" said the official. "We'll give you a test and if you pass it we'll allow you to go through". Handing him a pencil and a sheet of paper, he told the artist to sketch several peasants standing nearby. Dore did it so quickly and skillfully that the guard was convinced he was indeed who he claimed to be. ***His work confirmed his word.***

When it comes to loving the people in the church does your work confirm your word? It's easy to *talk* about loving others but do your actions mirror your words? What about those people in the church that you find difficult to love? Jesus didn't say, "love those you like or who agree with you or support you". Jesus made a blanket statement, a general, inclusive statement intended to include every Christian! For those difficult to love, we must depend on the wonderful resource of Christ's love for that person. Here's the good news: ***Jesus can give you love for that person you can't seem to love on your own!*** Jesus gives us another resource to help us grow:

2.Sensitivity to others; Jesus softens our hearts towards God and others.

Please turn back to our passage in Ephesians and look in vs.17.

Vs.17- Paul calls on the recipients of his letter to live differently than unrepentant Gentiles. Note how he characterizes them with the phrase, **“in the futility of their minds”**. The word for “futility” means “to make vain or foolish”. Paul’s saying that the thinking of unrepentant Gentiles has no real purpose!!

Vs.18 Paul continues in his description of pagan Gentiles. Note the phrase, **“darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart”**. Paul blames this situation on ignorance due to hardness of heart. The word for “hardness” means “to make hard or callous”. It refers to the progressive inability of conscience to convict of wrongdoing. Hardened hearts often come from the snowball effect of sin. Sin has a progressive nature to it; for instance, casual pornography can lead to hardcore pornography which can then lead to more serious forms of sexual sin. These manifestations of serious sin result from hardened hearts!

Vs.19 Hardened hearts make people feel callous or insensitive to God and other people. The word for “callous” means, “being past feeling, to cease to feel pain”. This lack of sensitivity leads to all kinds of sensuality. Sensuality means “debauchery”. People caught in this sinful trap become “greedy to practice every kind of impurity”.

Vs.20 After painting this bleak picture of pagan Gentiles, Paul makes a positive, contrasting statement in this verse. He states, **“But that is not the way you learned Christ!”** Paul meant that the Ephesians didn’t discover God through the hardening of their hearts. Rather, they came to know Christ because of just the opposite; they had hearts *open* to God, *sensitive* to His Spirit’s work in their hearts and lives. ***By His Spirit, Jesus gave them sensitivity towards the things of God!*** Jesus can give us sensitivity towards the things of God too!!

Do you have a heart sensitive to God or one hardened towards God? Paul has described someone with a heart hardened towards God but what does someone look like who is sensitive towards God? For one thing, such as person models Christ-like behavior. He or she lives like Christ lived on this earth! A person sensitive to Christ lives a life full of the fruit of the Spirit: full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Would the people in your life who know you the best describe your life this way? One full of the fruit of the Spirit?

In my five year ministry at Carmichael Presbyterian church in the Sacramento area an elderly woman in our church asked if her grandson’s college choral group could come and present a concert at our church. For several months she pleaded with me to arrange this concert. Though I had an extremely hectic schedule, I finally relented, made the arrangements and told her “yes, they can come!” The date was set and I spent many hours arranging homes for the 50 college students to stay in, lining up people to cook dinner which the choir wanted to have at our church and staff people for sound, etc. On the day of their scheduled arrival, I asked the woman what her grandson’s name was so I could introduce myself when they arrived. She said to me, “Oh, I forgot to tell you, he *left* the group last year!” That’s what I call insensitivity to others!

We discover another resource Jesus provides for us to grow in vs.22-24. This brings us to:

3.Instruction; Jesus teaches us to put off the old self and put on the new self!

Vs.22- Paul switches metaphors again, this time to clothing. He instructs us to “**put off your old self**”. Paul describes our old self as one which “**belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires**”. Our old self, our former manner of life, consists of our pre-Christian values, attitudes and behaviors.

When I buy a pair of new jeans, they usually begin with being worn for events away from home such as dinners out, movies, shopping, trips, etc. After a few years, the same pair of jeans gets relegated to staying home. After a few more years, the jeans make their way to the garage where they take up new residence. By the time they get to the garage, those jeans are used for weed-eating, changing the oil on cars, etc. Gradually, those once new jeans become worn, faded, stained and eventually get tossed into the garbage. I just threw out an old pair the other day!!

Do you see the process of gradually putting them off? We should put off the old self this way! Rarely can we put off old bad habits, sinful relationships or sinful routine quickly or easily. It’s a gradual process of change!! Just like the journey of my jeans which move from brand new to not so new to old and faded and finally to thrown away, so should our old self be!

So, what bad habits do you need to get rid of today? Greed, lust, swearing, lying, coveting other people’s goods, gossiping, an addiction of some kind, insensitivity to others?

Let’s do a little exercise. On your outline I have allotted room for you to write down a bad habit, sinful attitude, behavior or relationship you believe God wants you to take off and get rid of. Like my old jeans, old habits rarely depart quickly. It’s usually a process of change but it can happen with God’s help! Take a moment and ask God to help you get rid of that old sinful habit!

Vs.23-after taking off the old self we want to be made new in the spirit of our minds. The word for “renew” means, “make new”. God can make us new people with new hearts and new minds!

Vs.24 In making our minds and hearts new we put on the new self, literally the new “man” or “woman”. Paul describes our new self as “**created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness**”. Imagine buying a new outfit that makes you look *really* good. People will notice! People also notice godly changes in your habits, attitudes and relationships. So, what does God want you to “put on”? In **Colossians 3:12** Paul tells us to, “**Put on, then as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience**” Which of these traits do you need to begin wearing?

Jesus provides the resources to help us grow in our faith! These resources include: **love** for our brothers and sisters in Christ, **sensitivity towards others**, and **instruction** to take off our old selves and put on the new self. Let us pray.