

Ephesians 4:7-16

Introduction

I. Grace's Statement of Faith

"The purpose of the Church is to give God the worship and praise He deserves, to **build up every believer to spiritual maturity**, and to make disciples of every nation, through word and deed serving as ambassadors for Christ."

II. We want to be a church committed to building people up into spiritual maturity

The Passage

I. The theme of growth/maturity/growing up

A. Images of Growth

1. Building image: "Built up" (v. 12, v. 16)
2. Human image: "growing up/maturing" (v. 13, v. 15)

B. The goal of maturity is Christ-likeness

1. Growing up into the head, that is Christ (v. 15)
Jesus is the "firstborn," our older brother who paved the way and leads us (his brothers and sisters) into his mature qualities
2. Attaining to the fullness of Christ (v. 13)
 - a. We are to grow up into his courage, compassion, joy, wisdom, love, control, etc.
 - b. We are to do this in "all things" (loving our enemies, praying like Jesus, treat money like Jesus, think about sexuality like Jesus, trusting God through hard times like Jesus, etc.)

C. The opposite of maturity = infants (v. 14)

= not stable, not rooted, no solid foundation, easily deceived

D. The Great commission

1. Make "Disciples" (= not converts, or church goers, but committed followers)
2. "Learning to obey everything I commanded"
Learning to live the way Jesus lived

II. The theme of togetherness/unity/group

A. Unity "oneness" (v. 4-6)

B. The goal of maturity is a group goal

1. Until "we all" reach unity in the faith and knowledge of son of God (v. 13)
2. "Become mature" literally reads "reach the mature man" (v. 13)
The idea is that we're not just a bunch of individually mature people, but that we are one mature maturity

C. The way we reach maturity is by growing together

1. The leaders' role is not to do the ministry but to equip the body to minister to itself (v. 11-12)
2. The body "builds itself up" as each person does their unique work (v. 16)

D. Bulletin Quote: "The idea of salvation cannot be reduced to a personal relationship with Jesus. God's plan is much more encompassing. God intends for salvation to be a community-creating event."

III. Cultural barriers to growing together

A. Consumerism

1. Consumerism sees the world as products that exist to provide us with gratification, pleasure, comfort, entertainment
2. Growing in maturity takes commitment, discipline, continued focus, delayed gratification (consider Paul's athletic metaphors in Scripture)
3. Consumerism is not interested in the hard work required for long term maturity

B. Individualism

1. Individualism considers faith merely in terms of our own personal relationship with Jesus with personal growth as the main goal of this life
2. Individualism can take two forms
 - a. We don't focus on building others up—just focused on our own pursuit
 - b. We are uncomfortable with others building us up
In our pride and sense of self-sufficiency, we don't know how to depend on others and lean on them
3. Athletic analogy: God is not just creating individual athletes; he's forming a team

Application

I. Join a small group this fall (men's group, women's group, home group)

II. Pursue a few key relationships where you are explicitly committed to growing together in Christ

III. Consider your current small group(s)

A. Where small groups go wrong

1. When they are purely (or primarily) social and do not get to the deeper questions/issues
2. When they staying on a head level and never address the heart issues
Example: just having theological conversations when there are significant life issues going on in the group
3. When they don't handle conflict well (speaking the truth in love)

B. Where small groups go right

1. When growing together is the explicit goal of the group
2. When God's Word is central
3. When there is a lot of building up and encouraging going on (stories of how God is at work)
4. When there is challenge: "let us spur one another on towards love and good deeds"
5. When there is prayer for each other in and out of the meeting
6. When there is a genuine commitment to each other as people (not just to meeting once a week)
7. When truth is spoken in love
 - a. speaking the hard truth to each other
 - b. speaking the vulnerable truth about ourselves

C. Stop and Reassess Your Group

1. Have a conversation together with your small group:
 - a. Are we really growing in Christ together?
 - b. What would help us grow together more?

2. In preparation for that conversation, have a conversation with yourself
 - a. What would need to change that would help me grow?
 - b. Am I helping them grow? Have I committed to their growth? How can I use my unique gifts to build up these friends?

Discussion Questions

1. What was the most personally inspiring, encouraging, or surprising aspect of Paul's description and vision for the church community from Ephesians 4?

2. Where do you see consumerism and/or individualism playing out in your faith?
Where do you see them playing out in your relationship with Grace Fellowship Church?

3. Consider your specific small group in light of Sunday's sermon.
 - a. Speaking personally, what do you need from this group that would be most helpful and encouraging to your own growth in spiritual maturity?
 - b. Do you think your group is truly growing together in Christ through this small group? What issues need to be addressed, and what changes would you like to make as you go forward together this fall?