



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

*Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:11-16*

“Ephesians 4:13-16 presents spiritual maturity as absolutely necessary and the lack of it as a dangerous state for the church to be in...a church lacking in spiritual maturity will likely succumb to the machinations of false teachers & other forces of error who are resolved to deceive, mislead, & destroy.” [Emmanuel Mbennah, *Mature Church*, p. xii]

“When the gifts operate in their God-appointed manner, & the saints are active in service for the Lord, three dangers are avoided: immaturity, instability, & gullibility [credulity].” [William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, p. 1936]

1. Paul Joins God in His Mission (Phil. 1:6; 3:13-14; Col. 1:28)
  - a. Paul realizes God’s goal was our maturity (Phil. 1:6; 3:13-14)
    - a. God “who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 1:6)
    - b. “...I don’t consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind & reaching forward to what is ahead, 14 I pursue...the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13-14)
  - b. Paul (& co-workers) labor to present everyone mature in Christ (Col. 1:28)
    - a. “We proclaim [Christ], warning & teaching everyone...so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” (Col. 1:28)
    - b. “Paul...vigorously proclaimed Christ...[with] the goal to ‘present everyone mature [Gk. teleion, perfect, complete] in Christ’ (Col. 1:28). Teaching about Christ brings about soul-change, eventually leading to complete conformity to the image of Christ...as a result of union with Christ.” [Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, p. 41]
    - c. Epaphras “always wrestles for you in prayer...that you...stand firm & be fully mature...in God’s entire will.” (Col. 4:12)
  - c. Paul asks the leaders to join God in his mission (Acts 20:29-30)
    - a. Paul tells church leaders: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Men will rise up...from your own number & distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them.” (Acts 20:29-30)
  - d. Background & Context Eph. 4:1-16

- a. "Here...is Paul's vision for the church. God's new society is to display charity, unity, diversity & growing maturity. These are the characteristics of 'a life worthy of the calling' (Eph. 4:1)." [John Stott, Message of Ephesians, p. iii]
- b. Eph. 4: The 1st section (Eph. 4:1-6) covers "unity...organically related to the divine intention...The 2nd section (Eph. 4:7-16) introduces the note of diversity & shows how it contributes to the unity of the body, since Christ's giving of gifts...[is] for [the church's] full maturity...The whole paragraph [Eph. 4:1-16]...is concerned about unity, diversity, & maturity. This important paragraph focuses specifically on the church. It is the sphere into which the believers have [been] called by God...A major image is the body (Eph. 4:4, 12, 16), & it is combined with the language of building (Eph. 4:12, 16) & the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Ministries have been given by Christ, particularly ministries of the Word, to enable the body of Christ to attain to its ultimate goal, that is, 'the unity in the faith & the knowledge of God's Son...unto maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness' (Eph. 4:13)." [Peter T. O'Brien, Ephesians, p. 317]

## 2. Intentionally Growing To Maturity (Eph. 4:13) "Until we all reach...maturity"

"Until we all reach unity in the faith & in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." (Eph. 4:13)

"It appears that Eph. 4:13 is the only passage in the NT where the ultimate goal of spiritual maturity is specified. The question, then, is: According to this pericope, what is the ultimate goal of maturity and why is maturity essential for the Christian?" [Emmanuel D. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," Acta Theologica [AT], Vol. 36(1) (2016) p. 112]

### a. Maturity—an Imperative or an Option?

- a. "A key question [to address:]...Is maturity simply something nice, good [an optional extra?] or [is it] important, or [is the goal of maturity vital &] necessary for the church? Is Paul merely recommending or inviting the church, to consider & [perhaps] make a decision as to whether or not [it chooses] to grow towards such maturity?...It is apparent that [in Eph. 4] maturity is imperative." [Emmanuel D. Mbennah, "...Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, V. 36(1) (2016) p. 128]

### b. Being intentional about our spiritual growth—"Until we all reach..." (Eph. 4:13)

- a. "The literal sense of the verb 'till we all come' is until we all arrive at a place...The verb also connotes intentionality to pursue the attainment of a specific state. Thus, ?????, 'till', has both a prospective force & intentionality...the apostles, 2 evangelists, prophets [etc.]...are to continue to carry out their task both until the whole church reaches the...destination stated and in order that the church might reach that destination. In using the word ?????, Paul depicts the church as being, or...expected to be, on the way to some specific final spiritual state. The church is to move towards the stated goal & keep moving until she attains that destination." [E. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity...", AT, Vol. 36(1) pp. 120-121]

### c. ALL members should strive to arrive (Eph. 4:13)

- a. "It is possible for a Christian to participate meaningfully in Church activities & yet be spiritually immature...One could reflect good observable [Christian] behaviors, actively participate in church [outreach] activities that...lead to growing [church] membership, & contribute financially for the work of the church without [aspiring to be] spiritually mature." [Emmanuel Mbennah, Mature Church, p. 136]
- b. "The focus is on corporate maturity. We are accustomed to thinking...in individual terms, but here the emphasis is on the Church." [Peter Williamson, Ephesians, p. 121]
- c. The inclusive 'all' (?? ?????) is part of the goal, towards which 'all' are to strive until they attain it...In the context of the church, the 'all'...refer[s]...to the body of Christ...[&] implies the notion of the qualitative development of the church as an organism from within...Note...Paul uses 'we all,' & not 'each one of us,' to counter possible over-individualization [& to] underscore the corporate sense of spiritual maturity...The verb ??????????...in this context... refers to attaining or arriving at a particular final...state or destination." [E. Mbennah, "Goal...Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, V. 36(1) p. 121]

### d. ALL arriving at maturity

#### a. the unity of the faith & the knowledge of the son of God (Eph. 4:13)

"There may be other kinds of unity, but ultimately, the church is to attain unity of the faith & of the knowledge of the Son of God...The construction presents the unity of faith & the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God – two separate kinds [aspects?] of unity." [Emmanuel Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, V. 36(1) p. 121]

#### a. "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13)

- a. "The 'one faith' in Eph. 4:6, which Christians already have, is not the same as the 'unity of the faith' in Eph. 4:13. 'One faith' [4:6] may simply mean one creed, one confession of faith...[Here (4:13)] Paul has in mind faith as objective content, or...objective truths...the person has been taught & [has] knowledge of this body of truths ...'[The] faith' in...Eph. 4:13...refer[s] to a body of doctrine." [E. Mbennah, "...Maturity...", AT, V. 36(1) p. 122]
- b. "There is 'one faith,' but the goal of Christian endeavor is unity of this faith, to fully appropriate the oneness of faith. The idea...[is] the whole church moving towards the appropriation of all that is contained in its one faith. ...Christians are to continuously mature until they...all...share a single faith and acknowledge a common bond." [Emmanuel D. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, Vol. 36(1) (2016) p. 122]

- c. "The 'unity of the faith' refers to the contents of what we believe, i.e., Christian doctrine, rather than a vague unity based on 'having faith' or being 'persons of faith'." [Peter Williamson, Ephesians, p. 120]
  - d. "Maturity in Christ...is not merely about virtue [love] but also about knowledge, about doctrine & theology. Eph. 4:14 depicts a state... that's the opposite of maturity...Maturity in Christ...is a comprehensive ('in every way' Eph. 4:15), communal experience." [Michael J. Gorman, Apostle of the Crucified Lord, p. 598]
  - e. "Some people think [wrongly] that the learning of doctrine is inherently divisive, but it is people who divide the church, whereas the knowledge of the Son of God (both knowing Christ personally & understanding all that he did & taught) is edifying & brings about 'matur[ity]' when set forth in love (Phil. 3:10). The work of the gifted ministers (Eph. 4:11) was to proclaim & teach the word centered on Christ, [not] eccentric teachings..." [ESV]
  - f. "Eph. 4:13...depicts the threefold goal of...[1.] attainment of unity of faith & knowledge, [2.] maturity, & [3.] the stature of Christ. Not that a few of the church will attain to these ends, but that all will." [Kuruvilla, Eph., p. 127]
  - b. "unity of...the knowledge of God's Son" (Eph. 4:13)
    - a. "The faith (Eph. 4:13) is best seen as indicating the body of the faith, [in] the objective sense of what is believed ...'Knowledge' (4:13) is likely the personal & experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ...What is sought is unity... in a common set of doctrines & in a common experience of the Christ." [Abraham Kuruvilla, Ephesians, p. 127]
    - b. "The unity of this knowledge [of God's Son]...require[s] a progressive movement toward full appropriation of the knowledge of Christ, which will result in a personal and living relationship with Christ...The church must strive to come to this knowledge..." [E. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 123]
    - c. "The goal of Christian [ministry]...entails a communal unity in faith, through the personal, sweet knowledge of Jesus, such that we all grow into his likeness, everyone moving, little by little, into his image, helped by each other's ['trusting in] love' [Eph. 4:15a]." [Eric L. Johnson, Foundations for Soul Care, p. 42]
  - b. At maturity—Lit. "until we all arrive at...[the] full-grown man" (Eph. 4:13 Darby)
    - a. "Used in reference to the church, it...mean[s]...the [mature] church...[at] the end of her development [where she] stands complete...in complete conformity to Christ. Since Paul is writing...to the church, [so,] ???????...means...the 3 church is viewed as a corporate entity, [so,] 'we all'...move toward 'the mature person,' not 'mature people' [plural]—the plural is in the lower stage of maturity." [E. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph 4:13-16," AT, V. 36(1) p. 124]
    - b. In "Eph. 4:13, [church] maturity means all Christians together as the church...attaining a state of oneness of the contents of faith &...possession of...full understanding of Christ, & being...completely filled with Christ...[as a]... manifestation of Christ in the world." [E. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 127]
  - c. Conformity—Matching Christ—"with a stature measured by Christ's fullness" (Eph. 4:13)
    - a. "The 'Christ's fullness,' in...Eph. 4:13...refers to the church attaining the standard...of a church that is filled with Christ, or which Christ fills, as well as...complete conformity to Christ, & all Christians reaching this high standard. The 'measure of the stature of [Christ's] fullness'...means attaining the perfection of faith...[i.e.,] to hold fast to Christ as true & perfect God and to mature unto a full understanding of the divinity of the Son of God." [Emmanuel D. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, Vol. 36(1) (2016) p. 126]
    - b. "The church is progressively being conformed to the perfect image of Jesus in all his fullness. 'The glorified Christ, says F. F. Bruce, 'provides the standard at which his people are to aim: the corporate Christ [i.e., the church] cannot be content to fall short of the perfection of the personal Christ' [F. F. Bruce, pp. 350-51]."
    - c. "In Eph. 4:13 Paul states that the fullness of Christ and his own completeness is the standard against which the maturity of the church is to be measured. Jesus Christ has ascended to heaven to his place of ultimate authority after triumphing at the cross and as a result has given to his church gifts (Eph. 4:10–11). These gifts are for the purpose of the spiritual growth of the church, 'unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:12– 13). The 'not yet' side of the ...tension is again made explicit at this point. While this fullness is spoken of as accomplished earlier in Ephesians, it is spoken of here...as something which must be pursued, & for which God has sent the Spirit and gifted his church. In Ephesians, then, the combination of 'fullness' & 'Spirit' language refers to the abiding presence of God in Christ with, in, & among his people. While Christ 'fills' all things in that his rule as Lord is cosmic in scope, his presence resides uniquely in the church (Eph. 1:23; 4:10–13)." [T. Gombis "Eph. 5:18 in its Epistolary Setting," Tyndale Bulletin, Vol. 53.2 (2002) p. 262]
  - d. Indicators of maturity (Eph. 4:14-16)
    - a. "Indicators of maturity...include the corporate stability & constancy in the truth; the ability to discern error & reject or correct it; the ability & predisposition to 'speak the truth in love,' (4:15) and the meaningful participation of all members through effective use of their individual gifts. Unity is a reality...when there is maturity." [Emmanuel D. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16," AT, Vol. 36(1) (2016) p. 128]
    - b. "Indicators of progress...towards spiritual maturity [include a] growing ability to remain in the truth, to identify & reject error, & to...correct error...in love [by] 'speaking the truth in love' (4:15)." [Mbennah, Mature Church, p. 136]
3. The Dangers of Remaining Immature—instability & susceptibility (Eph. 4:14)
- a. "Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves & blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit." (Eph. 4:14)
  - b. "Paul shows that spiritual maturity is necessary because without it Christians will not stop being children." [Emmanuel Mbennah, Mature Church, p. 69] ? "Spiritual maturity is imperative for the church, because without such maturity the church will fall prey to false and wrong doctrinal teachings by persons from within & from outside the church who are both intentional about & highly skilful in scheming to lead Christians astray." [E. Mbennah, "Goal of Maturity in Eph 4:13-16," AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 131]

- c. “Eph. 4:13-16 presents spiritual maturity to be an absolute necessity for the continual survival and propagation of the church, and lack of it as a grave matter for the church. [However,] the church leaders [responding to Dr. E. Mbennah’s survey in general] did not show an understanding of the weight of spiritual maturity anywhere close to that.” [Emmanuel D. Mbennah, *Mature Church*, p. 138]
- d. No longer be little children (Eph. 4:14)
  - a. “The clause ‘so that we may no longer be children...’ provides a general comment on the current state of the readers.” [E. Mbennah, “Goal of Maturity in Eph 4:13-16,” *AT*, V. 36(1) p. 127]
  - b. “In this context, being an infant is...negative...implying...instability & susceptibility to deception & to being led astray ...unstable, lacking in direction, vacillating, and open to manipulation.” [Emmanuel Mbennah, *Mature Church*, p. 70]
  - c. “For Paul ‘immaturity is evidenced in instability, rootless-ness, lack of direction, doctrinal vacillation, & susceptibility to manipulation & error’ (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 257)...Immaturity is especially evident when believers are easily duped by false teaching & always seem to embrace whatever new theological fad is being promoted...In other words, at the heart of childish immaturity is the lack of theological discernment.” [Sam Storms, *Ephesians 4:1-16*]
- e. Tossed & blown about
  - “...No longer...tossed by the waves & blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.” (Eph. 4:14)
  - a. Ian’s experiences
  - b. From inside the church (Acts 20:28-30; Rom. 16:17-18; Gal. 1:6-7; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 4:1-7; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:15-18; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 Jn. 4:1-3; Jude 4; Rev. 2:2)
    - a. Circumcision (Gal. 1:7; 5:2)
    - b. “Sex is bad” (1 Cor. 7:1)
    - c. Vain philosophies (Col. 2:4, 8, 16, 18)
    - d. ‘Heavenly tourism’—accounts of peoples’ ‘near death’ ‘experiences’ where they ‘visit heaven.’
      - a. 2015 saw “the release of the long-awaited movie adaptation of Don Piper’s best seller *90 Minutes in Heaven*. The ‘heaven tourism’ genre has proven remarkably lucrative to authors & their publishers, tallying well over 20M books sold over the past decade. *90 Minutes in Heaven*...seems primed for box office success, though it may have trouble chasing down 2014’s screen adaptation of *Heaven Is For Real* which earned over \$100M.”
  - e. Angel feathers
- c. “Human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.” (Eph. 4:14b)
  - a. “Human cunning” or “by the trickery of men” The word translated ‘trickery’ [‘cunning’] literally referred to the throwing of dice (Gk. *kubeia*; from which we derive the English word ‘cube’). False teaching acts ‘like a wary and dexterous gambler...winning by dishonesty without being suspected of it’ (Eadie, *Ephesians*, p. 316). There is nothing divine in this teaching: it is wholly of human origin [Sam Storms, *Ephesians 4:1-16*]
- d. Satan’s strategy against the church: Human “deceitful techniques” (4:14) reflect “the devil’s schemes” (6:11)
  - a. “wind[s] of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit” (Eph. 4:14)
  - b. Paul talks of “False teachers, who are...cunning & deceitful. [They] are not simply uninformed or incorrect teachers ...they [are not] innocent...[Paul] is talking about cunning...the craft which error uses. The same word is used to describe the Serpent’s act when he deceived Eve (2 Cor. 11:3; Gen. 3:1-9). Satan’s machinations have a method; his aim is to mislead... Behind the false teachings are not simply...men & women who pursue their unscrupulous goals ...Rather, behind the false teachers is a supernatural, evil power that seeks to deceive Christians...The term ?????????? [‘techniques (of deceit)’] occurs only in Eph. 4:14 [&] in Eph. 6:11, it’s used in the plural, ?????????? [‘the schemes (of the devil)’], to refer to the wiles of the devil.” [E. D. Mbennah, “Goal of Maturity,” *AT*, V. 36(1) p. 130]
- e. Be a ‘Berean’ (Acts 17:10-11)
  - a. “The people [in Berea] were of more noble character...they received the word [preached by Paul & Silas] with eagerness & examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)
  - b. “The Bereans as ‘more noble’ in...receiving Paul’s message with all eagerness, & then in looking to the written words [the OT Scriptures] as their final authority, ‘examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so’... Luke encourages this searching of the Scriptures as a pattern for all believers and...support[s]...the clarity of Scripture, the idea that the Bible can be understood rightly, not only by scholars but also by ordinary people who read it eagerly & diligently, with conscious dependence on God for help.” [ESV]

4. Speak & Live the Truth In Love (Eph. 4:15)

- a. “But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.” (Eph. 4:15)
- b. “The wording in Greek in Eph. 4:15 is [literally] ‘truthing in love.’ Of course, ‘truthing’ is not a word in English, but the idea is clear. Maturity involves a truth-telling, truth-doing love...Is your church known for truth and love corporately?” [Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, p. 102]
- c. “The truth must not be used as a club to bludgeon people into acceptance and obedience but must always be presented in love. The truth leads the Christian to maturity, which is defined here as growing up into Christ. As

head, Christ leads, directs, & guides the body” [ESV]

5. The Whole Body Grows From Christ (Eph. 4:16)

- a. “From [Christ] the whole body, fitted & knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.” (Eph. 4:16)
- b. “Paul continues the body metaphor to describe the church’s maturity. Every member (i.e., every believer, viewed as a limb, or unit, in Christ’s body) plays a crucial role in this growth. in love. There is no Christian maturity or true Christian ministry without love (1 Cor. 13), & every act of love in the name of Christ is valued & remembered by him, as each part is working properly.” [ESV]