MISSION OF GOD

UNITING HEAVEN AND EARTH

MESSAGE   **STUDY GUIDE**   GROUP MATERIAL   SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:11-16

Christ "himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors & teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, **13** *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. **14** 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. **15** But *speaking the truth in love, let us grow* in every way into him who is the head—Christ. **16** From him 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. 4:11-16 CSB)

SUMMARY:

The Bible repeatedly urges Christians to progress from the basics, 'milk,' to 'solid food' (profound, life-changing truths). Moreover, God wants a mature church, not just a few, full-grown Christians. Ephesians provides the key to a mature church–it's '*truth-ing in love'* (Eph. 4:15 literal). '*Truth-ing'* is not merely speaking the truth; it also includes doing, living & practicing biblical truths in our personal & community life. Guided by the Spirit of truth, let's walk the way of truth together, step-by-step developing godly habits which will gradually change our disposition, enriching our church-life until we all, as a church, arrive at maturity.

"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…" [Emmanuel Mbennah, *Mature Church*, p. xii]

"A Christian [could] participate…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…[to] the church without [becoming] spiritually mature." [E. Mbennah, *Mature Church*, p. 136]

1. **Marks of the Church's 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)

   a. Not individual maturity, but a Mature Church—"*until <u>we all</u> attain to…a mature person*…" (Eph. 4:13 NET)
      - "The focus is on *corporate* We are accustomed to thinking…in individual terms, but here the *emphasis is on the Church*…[Ask:] What would a mature [church, congregation] look like?" [Peter Williamson, *Ephesians,* p. 121]
      - "In Eph. maturity is not only for…the individual but the Christian community, (Eph 4:11-16)…It's [in] the context of…unity & diversity, that maturity is described." [B. Majerus, S. Sandage, "*Differentiation of Self & Christian Spiritual Maturity*," of Psychology & Theology, Vol. 38, #1, (2010) p. 43]
      - "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 <u>all</u> will.*" [Abraham Kuruvilla, *Ephesians,* 127]

   b. Arrive at "the unity in the faith & in the knowledge of God's Son" (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 [as]…two separate kinds [aspects?] of unity." [Emmanuel Mbennah, "*Goal of Maturity in Eph. 4:13-16*," AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 121]

   a. "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13) o "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 (Eph. 4:13)] Paul has in mind faith as objective content, or…objective truths…the person has been taught and [has] knowledge of this body of truths…'[The] faith' in…Eph. 4:13…refer[s] to a body of doctrine." [Emmanuel Mbennah, "*Goal of Maturity…Eph. 4*," AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 122]
      - "I…write, appealing to you to contend for *the faith* that was delivered to the saints once for all." (Jude v. 3) **Note:** In this context "'the faith' (i.e., the known & received *body of truth about Jesus & salvation* through him) had been once for all delivered to the saints (…Christians)…By [Jude's] time the *foundational NT teachings* were circulating." [ESV]
      - "There is 'one faith,' but the goal of Christian endeavor is *unity of* this 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 & acknowledge a common bond." [E. Mbennah, "…M*aturity in Eph. 4….*," AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 122]
      - "The 'unity of the faith' refers to the contents of what we believe, i.e., Christian doctrine, rather than a vague unity on 'having faith' or being 'persons of faith'." [Peter Williamson, *Ephesians,* p. 120]

   b. "unity of…the knowledge of God's Son" (Eph. 4:13)
      - "The faith (Eph. 4:13) is best seen as indicating the body of the faith, [in] the objective sense of what is believed… 'Knowledge' (Eph. 4:13) is likely the personal & experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ…What is sought is unity…in a common set of doctrines and in a common experience of the Christ." [Abraham Kuruvilla, *Ephesians,* p 127]
      - "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 & 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]
      - "The goal of Christian [ministry]…entails a communal unity…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 'speaking the truth in love' [Eph. 4:15a]." [Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care*, p. 42]

   c. Arriving at Conformity to Christ—"with a stature measured by Christ's fullness" (Eph. 4:13)
      - "Until we all attain…to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ." (Eph. 4:13)
      - "The phrase ['mature person' leads]…a number of interpreters…especially Western thinkers…to individualize…the 'mature…person'. The phrase ['mature person'] *is* singular, [but,]…Paul is referring to the body of Christ. However… the collective maturity of [Christ's] body…depend[s]…on the growth of each believer that makes up the whole ['til we all attain']." [Joy Ames, "*Teaching as Formation,*" Asbury Journal 69/2, p. 11]

- "The 2 phrases [–'to mature manhood' & 'to Christ's full stature'–] are roughly synonymous, the 2nd… more specific… It is not just the likeness of *any* mature person…which the church must attain, but rather, 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Lit. RSV). The Church is to fully resemble Christ." [Peter Williamson, *Ephesians,* 121]

- "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, *Colossians…Ephesians*, pp. 350-51]

d. Indicators of maturity (Eph. 4:14-16)

- "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,' (Eph. 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]

2. **Symptoms of Immaturity**

a. Unstable & Susceptible to Error (Eph. 4:14) "*Stability in the truth is a mark of maturity*"—Peter Williamson

- "…no longer…little children, tossed by the waves & blown around by every wind of teaching…" (Eph. 4:14a)

- "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]

- "For Paul 'immaturity is evidenced in instability, rootless-ness, lack of direction, doctrinal vacillation, & susceptibility to manipulation & error'…Immaturity is…evident when believers are easily duped by false teaching & always…embrace…new theological fad[s]…*At the heart of childish immaturity is the lack of theological discernment*." [Sam Storms, *4:1-16*]

b. Blown about by Winds of Doctrine (Eph. 4:14) –Two Current Examples

a. Universalism—Ultimately All People will be Saved (e.g. Rob Bell, *Love Wins*)

- "*Universalism* is the doctrine that all human beings—& perhaps all intelligent or volitional beings—will come to final salvation & spend an eternity with…God. This is a theory about a final outcome, & it leaves open the way that this outcome might be attained…[Some proponents hold that, since God is love,]…God's purposes in creating the world will fail if even one intelligent creature should finally be separated from God. This line of reasoning implies that not only human sinners but also fallen angels will finally be saved."—[Michael McClymond, *CT*, March 11, 2019]

- Response: *Will ALL Be Saved?* [Will All Be Saved? – The Gospel Coalition](#)

b. Trinity—EFS: the Eternal Functional Subordination of the Son to the Father

- "Debate focused on Christ's relationship to God the Father. Some argue that the Son is *eternally* subordinate to the Father, while others say the Son was subordinate *in his earthly life only*."—CT. EFS-proponents–Bruce Ware (S. Baptist Theol. Seminary) & Wayne Grudem (Phoenix Seminary)–sought to ground subordination in human gender roles—man's headship over his wife & family–upon an (alleged) authority-submission relationship existing eternally within the Godhead of the Trinity—thereby claiming a 'trump card' in the gender debate. This tampers with the Trinity!

c. Vulnerable to Satan's schemes behind Deceptive Doctrines (Eph. 4:14; 6:11)

- "No longer…blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning…in the techniques of deceit." (Eph. 4:14b) Paul talks of "False teachers, who are…cunning & deceitful. [They] are not simply uninformed… teachers…they [are not] innocent…[Paul] is talking about cunning…the craft…error uses. The same word… describe[s] 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…false teachings are not simply…[people's]…unscrupulous goals… Rather, behind [them] 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…plural, ????????? ['the *schemes* (of the devil)'], to refer to the wiles of the devil." [E. Mbennah, "*Goal of Maturity,*" AT, Vol. 36(1) p. 130]

d. Personal preference & allegiance; divisions (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-3)

- "I urge you, brothers & sisters…that there be no *divisions* among you…It's been reported to me…that there's rivalry among you. **12** What I'm saying is this: One of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' [or 'I follow Paul'] or 'I belong to Apollos,'…or 'I belong to Christ.' **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?…" (1 Cor. 1:10-13)

- …I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as *babies in Christ.* **2** I gave you *milk to drink, not solid food*, since you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you're still not ready. **3** because you're still worldly. For since there is envy [jealousy] & strife among you, are you not worldly & behaving like mere humans? **4** For whenever someone says, 'I belong to [or 'I follow] Paul,' & another, 'I belong to Apollos,' are you not acting like mere humans?" (1 Cor. 3:1-3)

- "Paul called the Corinthians infants…because they were not yet spiritually…mature. The proof was…they were quarreling …allowing divisions to distract them…Immature Christians often…are controlled by their own desires; mature believers are in tune with God's desires. How much influence do your desires have…?" [*NLT Life Application Study Bible*, p. 1982]

e. Not Progressing from 'Milk' to 'Meat' ['solid food'] (1 Cor. 3:1-2; Heb. 5:11-6:1)

- "We have a great deal to say about this…[but,] you've become too lazy to understand [or 'dull of hearing' (ESV)]**12** Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. *You need milk, not solid food.* **13** Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because *he is an infant.* **14** But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good & evil…*Let us* leave the elementary teaching about Christ & *go on to maturity*…" (Heb. 5:11-6:1)

- Veteran Christians, yet still immature, "complain if you give them more than milk. Not for them the solid knowledge of Scripture. Not for them mature theological reflection. Not for them…perceptive Christian thought. They want nothing more than…a 'simple message'…that won't challenge them to think, to examine their lives, to make choices & to grow in their knowledge & adoration of the living God." [D. A. Carson, *Cross & Christian Ministry*, p. 72]

- Hebrews' "author…challenge[s] his readers to mature further in their faith. He rebukes them for their lack of maturity… since by now they should have matured enough in the faith to instruct others. '*Basic principles…*' [ABC's] The most fundamental truths of God…'*Milk' vs. 'solid food*' ['Meat'] shows the readers' immaturity in the faith; they are like infants, whereas [as believers] they should be mature adults, well-learned…in the faith." [ESV]

- "In Hebrews, there's the exhortation to the Christian community as a whole to the theme of maturity."—Majerus & Sandage

3. **'Truth-ing' in Love—the Means to Church Maturity (Eph. 4:15, 25)**

a. Central, Summary Statement—"Speaking the truth in love…we grow…" (Eph. 4:15)

- God's fundamental vision for Body growth focuses on every member 'speaking the truth in love,' one to another in every situation…Get that &…you get God's purpose for His Body today…It's in Eph. 4:11-16." [R. W. Kellemen, *Equipping…*]

- "The Centrality of Speaking the Truth in Love: If there's any way to summarize…the instructions [of Ephesians 4-6]…it's 'speaking the truth in love.' [It is] central to the…text and…a complete…summary of the instructions…at least on the horizontal level…To *summarize in just a few words* [Paul's] *instructions* for behavior & lifestyle in the [NT] community, it's '*speaking the truth in love*'." [Peter J. Gentry, *"Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15)*," SBJT (2006) pp. 73, 75]

- "Negatively, the church must not be like children…easily deceived. Positively, the church must grow up and mature. Eph. 4:15 explains that this is by 'speaking the truth in love'…This is the *key statement* in this introductory section, and the *key to the* whole…*practical part of the letter*." [Peter J. Gentry, *"Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15)*," SBJT (2006) p. 73]

- "*Maturity in Christ…is* not merely about virtue [love…] but also *about knowledge, about doctrine & theology*. Eph. 4:14 depicts…the opposite of maturity…The *way to maturity is 'practicing the truth* in love' (Eph. 4:15) i.e., to bear witness to Jesus, in all of life, including speech…*Maturity in Christ…is a… communal experience*…The remainder of Ephesians is… exhortations on…individual & corporate maturing in Christ." [Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, p. 598]

b. 'Truth-ing': More than 'speaking the truth' (Eph. 4:15)

- "But *speaking the truth in love*, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ." (Eph. 4:15, CSB, etc.) ?   "Putting away lying*, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor*, because we are members of one another."(Eph. 4:25)

- English 4:15 '*speaking the truth*' & 4:25 '*speak the truth*' appear identical; yet Eph. 4:25 has verb 'speak,' 4:15 does not.