

THE MATURITY MANDATE

(Ephesians 4:11-13)

I. OPENING ILLUSTRATION

A. The Story of Athena Dean

B. Athena's problems:

- Improperly taught
- Inappropriately attached (Luke 15:15)
- Insufficiently developed
- Bottom Line Result: Spiritually immature and vulnerable

C. MP: In today's text—and next week's as well—we'll see that God has issued a **Maturity Mandate**: He has commanded and commissioned His very own Son, the exalted Lord Jesus Christ, to bring His people to full spiritual maturity, so that they may walk safe and sound through the wilderness of a dangerously deceptive world system, and arrive TOGETHER at their appointed destination: *The unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God; the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

II. REVIEW / INTRO

A. Review: Ephesians 4:1-16: A Meditation on Christian Unity

1. Background: Sin and Universal Disunity (**Slide: The Fractured Family of Man**)
2. Paul's Teaching on the Divine Restoration of Universal Unity
 - (4-6) The ground of unity:

⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.*

- (1-3) An urgent call to maintain the (present) unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Note: The soft, grace-oriented virtues)
- (13) God's ultimate purpose for His people: Absolute and Eternal Unity

¹³... *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

- (7-16) The God-ordained *means* for attaining Absolute Unity
 1. (9-10) The humiliation and exaltation of Christ
 2. (11-13) The gift of equipping ministries

3. (14-16) The ministry of the saints themselves to the Church and the world

B. Today's Text: Christ's Gift of Equipping Ministries (Slide)

1. (11) The five equipping ministries
2. (12) The ultimate purpose of these ministries
3. (13) The eternal result of these ministries

III. (11) THE FIVE EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

A. Text: *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers . . .*

B. Elements:

1. And He Himself gave . . .
2. Apostles (Sent Ones)
 - Big "A" Apostles/Foundational Apostles (70x's, 12+P) **(Slide)**
 - How they equip us: Through Scripture

"It is only through their word that believers of all following ages have communion with Jesus Christ."—Louis Berkhoff

- Little "a" apostles: messengers of the churches (e.g., Barnabas, Epaphroditus, etc.)
 - Modern examples: Missionaries, church planters
 - Best to avoid using the term, for fear of undue confusion
3. Prophets (Forthtellers)
 - Big "P" prophets: Foundational (Eph. 2:20)
 - Little 'p' prophets: Continuing **(2 Slides)**
 - More common than you think! (Preachers, Writers, Counselors, Sharers) (Note: Joel, Acts, Philip's daughters)
 - A word about prophetic diction
 4. Evangelists (Announcers of Good News!)
 - Gist of the gift
 - Examples: Philip, Timothy, Francis, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon
 - Not all are evangelists, but all are witnesses

- How do they equip us: By getting us saved, by modeling the Main Thing, by teaching us how to witness, and by leading us out

5. Pastors (Shepherds)

- Gist of gift: God-given attentiveness to the condition of individual sheep
- Note: Usually elders/overseers, but not always

6. Teachers (Instructors)

- Gist of gift: Opening and applying the Scriptures
- Note: Usually elders/overseers, but not always

C. Observations/Applications

1. These men are special gifts of Christ to His people

- Be grateful
- Take advantage of them

2. But remember:

- With the exception of big A apostles in the Scriptures, they are NOT infallible
- Nor do they have final authority over your faith and practice

3. Beware of the Protestant Pope Syndrome:

- God likes to use a PLURALITY of equippers/leaders
- This discourages inappropriate attachment to one man (**2 Slides**)
- This encourages appropriate attachment to the ONE MAN He is pleased to exalt: The Lord Jesus Christ: The ONE true Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher of His people! (**Matthew 23:5-12**)
- The BAD example of Israel clamoring for a human king
- The GOOD example of Mercy Hill!

IV. (12) THE PURPOSE OF THESE MINISTRIES

A. Text: ¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ . . .*

B. Elements:

1. For the equipping of the saints
2. For the work of ministry (service)

3. For the upbuilding of the Body of Christ (S: I will build My Church)

C. Observations/Applications: The Mercy Hill Philosophy of Ministry

- The leaders set in place and maintain the foundational ministries of the Church (Acts 2:42)
- We pray, wait, and watch to see YOU receive a call to ministry from the Lord (whether to the Church or the world)
- We help you evaluate the call and, if appropriate, support you in it.
- Examples: Park Movie Ministry, Save the Storks, Los Guilicos, PCC, RGM, ESL, Christian Dance Classes, Tutoring, etc.

V. (13) THE ETERNAL RESULT OF THESE MINISTRIES

A. Text: . . . *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

B. Intro: This is a TRULY amazing verse! The focus here is NOT on maturity of the individual Christian, but upon the maturity of the Universal Church; it is upon the great goal towards which God is working in history: The eternal restoration of the Family of Man

C. Elements (Very Brief)

1. Till we *all* come
2. To the unity of the faith
3. And the (perfect, clear) knowledge of the Son of God
4. To a mature Man

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.—Luke 2:52

5. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (**Slide**)

C. Observations/Applications

1. The Church is on a long, arduous journey through history towards:
 - The unity of the faith
 - The unity of the (experiential) knowledge of the Son of God
 - The two are closely related
2. We've made some good progress in this journey. (**Slide: 5 Solas**)

3. The success of our journey is enshrined in our *confessions*, which, *if they are true*, are GOOD things, since they promote deeper spiritual unity in Christ. **(S)**

4. The historical journey to unity is a painful process that often involves division. **(Slide)**

5. We must never settle for division in the true spiritual church, but always keep seeking deeper levels of consensus on the truth that unites us in Christ. **(Slide)**

6. In our pursuit of a more perfect unity we must always maintain godly attitudes. This means:

- Guarding the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace *around the essentials of the faith* (4:4-6)
- Doing so by remembering human weakness, and so practicing the grace-oriented virtues mentioned in Ephesians 4:1-3: humility, gentleness, patience, and love.
- Recognizing that it is God alone who, in His own time, advances his Church in the understanding of His truth; and so praying in faith, and patiently waiting till He does.

VI. CONCLUSION/PRAAYER