

When I was growing up I really wanted to be a fighter pilot. I had all the books, I knew my planes, and I loved flying. All that came from one day someone, I can't remember who, asking me "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Now I ask that same question of my boys 40 years later - what do you want to be when you grow up. And whilst in their primary years their ideas may have been fanciful, now with our Josh they become a lot more solidified as he considers University courses.

Jesus wants us all to grow up, to mature, to seek after perfection that can only be found in following him. But he also wants His Church to grow up. Look again at Ephesians 4:13-15. We're told that he will equip his Church to '*reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

In summary he needs all of us to grow up – to stop getting caught up in the things that distract us. So what does a grown-up Church look like? Let's look more closely at our passage today.

Verse 11 "He gave (us) the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers"

You might think to yourself – that's fine but we don't have APOSTLES today. But every time you read from the New Testament, you're reading from the teachings of the Apostles. If we want shaping then we've got to read about how they lived. Next, the PROPHETS were men who proclaimed God's Will to the church. The EVANGELISTS were those who took God's Word into the market place and homes and shared with individuals bringing them to a relationship with Christ. The PASTORS were those who got alongside people in need, the sheep in trouble, and provided support and comfort through God's Word and his Holy Spirit's healing. And TEACHERS - these were men and women who laid the foundation for Christ's church.. Unfortunately as I read that list I realise that too often the structures of the Church and congregations can place these functions all on one person – the minister, and yet that's not the model taught in the New Testament. But that's a different conversation not for today.

So, let's look at what makes the Church grow. What would a grown up Church look like?

Well, 1st – **a mature church is active**. Ephesians 4:11-12 "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for **works of service**, so that the body of Christ may **be built up**".

Churches can feel like a McDonald's Drive in. You arrive up in your car, you ask for what YOU want, you get what you want, and you drive off until the next time. There are so many areas of ministry that God's people have the opportunity to engage in – young people's ministry, compassion ministries, administration, teaching, evangelism, the list goes on. But these can't happen if people just drive up to church and then drive home again until next Sunday. We have got to be involved in service.

I thank God that we are a church family that serves, and whilst there is much room for growth and improvement, we have many who become involved in ministries because of their love of Jesus.

The 2nd thing I noticed about a mature church is - **it knows the truth**. Ephesians 4:14 tells us our objective as a church is to equip people "... [so that they] *will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming*"

With the advent of the internet and in particular YouTube, you can go on there and find out anything about anything. I recently went onto YouTube to watch some tutorials on how to fix something heavy onto a stud wall. It was something of a shock when I searched to find literally hundreds of videos telling me what to do. So then the issue was, which one is best, which one provides all the truth.

And it's the same in life - where can we really find truth in today's world which gives so much and so varying views and opinions? People can be swayed so easily. So how do we avoid this? Well by knowing the Word of God. This isn't just a book – it's God's Word, and all you know about Jesus and God's Will and what we should do as Christians... it's right here in this book. If you want the answers to marriage they are in here, if you want the answers to work they're in here. If you want the answers to looking after children, they're all in here. So can I ask, how much time each day are each of us sitting in God's Word? Could I ask you to consider increasing that? What sacrifice would you have to make for that?

So a mature church does works of service; a mature church sits on God's Word.

Finally, a church that is mature will be a church **that speaks the truth... in love**. Ephesians 4:15 says "*speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ*"

You know we can have churches that have lots of activity, lots of serving, and lots of teaching. But if we don't have love, Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church says that we are nothing more than a clanging cymbal. They may speak the truth, but they don't live it out in love and care about people.

Some denominations in Northern Ireland have been criticised recently over their stance on how they accept certain people within society into the church. And we must always stand up for the truth of what is written in God's Word as it has been presented to us. At times this is definitely going to offend parts of society. I think however the one area that we all need to work better at is how to speak that truth in love. Loving someone does not ever mean compromising or short changing God's Word – we have to speak truth, but it's how we do it.

The Bible warns us about comparing our righteous deeds with the righteous deeds of others. Comparing what we do with what they don't is not a good avenue to go down. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:12 "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise"

Don't compare your hard work for Jesus with what others are doing - or NOT doing. Jesus said: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify..."

who? YOU? I don't think so. Your good deeds should be all about glorifying your Father who is in heaven. Let's speak the truth folks, but let's do it to bring glory to God and not our own self-importance.

So let's finish. Someone once saw a sign in front of a church building that said: "Church under construction... excuse our mess." But that's also a sign that could be put up at a church like ours. We're under construction, We're attempting to grow up and be mature for Christ, and we will be mature when each of us determines to 1) Do all we can do to serve Christ; 2) Do all we can do to stand on God's Word; and 3) Do all we can do to speak the truth in Love.

The strength of the church... depends upon all of us. Ephesians 4:15-16 says *"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."*

The church grows up when EACH PART works. That's my hope and prayer for this Church, that we all pull together as we grow together in love.