

Ephesians 4:11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 June 1982

Preacher: Donald Macleod

[0 : 00] We shall turn now to the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, on the fourth chapter, reading at verse 11, Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 11.

And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some pastors and teachers for perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Now Paul's starting point in this section, as we see, is concerned to remind the church of the gifts that God had given to it.

And even more narrowly, to bring before the church the kinds of office bearers which was God's will the church should have in order to its ministry.

And Paul goes on to itemize what those gifts and those offices are, apostles, prophets and so on. But you will see that he goes off at once into another realm of thought altogether.

[1 : 35] He begins to contemplate the precise purpose for which God gave those gifts to the church. He gave some apostles and so on for perfecting the saints and for the edifying of the body of Christ.

And his concern, therefore, is not at all so much with those offices in themselves. He doesn't tell us what their qualifications are.

He doesn't tell us what their function is to be. But he goes on instead to bring before us the overriding concern that God had when he gave those gifts to the church.

And that concern, says the apostle, the concern which lay behind the giving of apostles, pastors, teachers, teachers and so on, that concern was to perfect the saints.

The concern was to edify the body of Christ. And Paul goes on in the ensuing context to expand upon that theme that not only is the body of Christ to be built up, but it is to be so built up that we all come into the unity of the faith.

[3 : 12] And we all come unto a perfect man. And as it is in verse 15, until we all grow up into Christ in all things.

In other words, Paul is saying to us that the reason for God's giving the church all of those gifts is God's overriding concern for the growth of his own children and the growth of the body of Christ in its corporate aspect as a fellowship of believers.

And so he begins by saying God gave the church certain kinds of officers. But he moves on to tell us why God gave us those officers.

And he says the great reason was God's concern that Christians should grow. And I want for a moment this morning to focus upon that precise problem.

The problem of Christian growth. The problem at the individual level that it is not enough that we are God's children.

[4 : 40] It's not enough that we are born again. It's not enough that in the definitive sense we are saved. We have to move on beyond the point of the new birth.

And beyond the point of adoption. And beyond the point of definitive salvation. We have to move on in terms of Christian growth.

It is unnatural to stay at the point of our Christian origins. It is unnatural to remain at the point of conversion.

We have to move on. We have to grow. That is why God gave the church pastors and teachers. That is why we have still the apostolic ministry.

In order to our individual growth. And yet. And this is maybe even more important. It isn't a matter simply of individual growth.

[5 : 48] It is also and indeed perhaps primarily. A matter of corporate growth. That not only should Christians as such grow individually.

But our congregations. Our churches denominations. These too should grow. They should grow as congregations.

They should grow in their numerical strength. They should grow in the quality of their collective Christian discipleship.

And I'm saying therefore. That the great challenge brought before us by these words. Is a challenge of growth.

The challenge that as individuals we should grow. And that as congregations equally. We should be growing. And I want to ask two broad questions.

[6 : 55] The question first of all. In what specific areas. Should we be growing. And then secondly. What are the conditions.

Of growth. In what areas do we grow. And secondly. What are the conditions of growth. If we turn then to the first of these.

In what specific areas. Does Paul say. That we Christians. Are to be growing. The first answer sure is this.

That we ought to be growing. In Christian stability. As the apostle puts it in verse 40. That we henceforth.

Be no more children. Tossed to and fro. And carried about. With every wind of doctrine. Now to Paul.

[7 : 57] Now to Paul. That was a sad. Pastoral reality. He had seen time and again. That kind of Christian.

He had seen time and again. That kind of congregation. And they were so unstable. They were so unstable. They were children. They were tossed through and fro.

They were born about. By every wind of teaching. Let me go beyond that. And make the problem. Even more dramatic still.

It was no accident. Paul says. That there were Christians. Who were so unstable. It was no accident. Because. There were men.

In the world. And there were men. In the visible church. And they were lying. In wait to deceive. Now in many ways.

[8 : 57] These might be deemed. To be unkind words. Paul was speaking. As some of his fellow men. And Paul was saying. That they were lying.

In wait to deceive. And Paul was even speaking. Of men. In the church of Christ. And he was saying.

Of these men. That they were lying. In wait to deceive. And Paul was speaking. Even more. Of those who were teachers. In the church of Christ.

And they were lying. In wait to deceive. He had seen that whole problem. When he took farewell. Of the elders. As we saw.

In Acts chapter 20. Of your own. Shall men arise. He says. Not sparing the flock. In other words.

[9 : 53] Paul is speaking. In terms of total realism. And Paul is saying. There are false teachers. There are false prophets.

There are those who are wolves. In sheep's clothing. There are men of great ability. Of great charm. Of great communication skill.

Men of attractive personality. Men of unquestioned credentials. Men even of your own selves.

And they. Are lying in wait to deceive. And in order to that deception. He says. They practice. Every kind of cunning.

And every kind of craftiness. And every kind of subtlety. There is method. There is strategy. In the way. That they endeavor.

[10 : 52] To secure. This deception. And this unsettling. Of the church of Jesus Christ. Now. It would be naive.

To mention. That we today. Are no longer. In this kind of situation. If anything. It is for us. An aggravated situation.

There are still. Those who lie close. To the citadel. Of respectability. And orthodoxy. In the church of Christ.

And they are lying. In way to deceive. Trying to seduce. And to allure. Men and women. By their false teaching. And that is why.

This whole quality. Of stability. Is of such. Enormous importance. There are the cults. Who come with all.

[11:51] Their plausible constructions. With their pretended. Biblical basis. There are those. Great new movements. Which lie close. Through the.

Historic. Evangelical stream. Like the charismatic movement. There again. There is the same. Danger. The same. Temptation.

The same. Campaign. To. Allure. And disaduce. Those. Who profess. The name. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ.

That are those. May be close. That atorn. May say to us. That unless we know. When we.

Experience. God's grace. Unless we know. The moment. Of our own conversion.

Unless we are. This conscious experience. Of passing. From death. To life. Unless it is. Conscious. And memorable. To say. Then we're not.

[12:46] Christians at all. There are those. Who come and say. To us. Unless you accept. That. The AV. Is the only. Authentic.

Version. Of God's word. Then again. You're not. Christians. There is the whole. Modernist. Liberal. Construction. There is the whole.

Renewed. And. Resuscitated. Romish. Peril. We have to survive. In the face. Of. All these. Pressures. And the only.

Way. To survive. Is that we should. Grow. In. Christian. Stability. That we should. Be. No more. Children.

Tossed. To and fro. And blown about. With every. Wind of doctrine. There are laws. In the church. Of Christ.

[13:42] Paul. The same. And they're. Constantly. Flitting about. Theologically. From the one. Fashion. To the next. From the one.

Church. To the next. From the one. Favored. Preacher. To the next. They're. Butterflies. They're. Like. Leaves. On the surface. Of the ocean. They're. Like. Little. Children. Tossed. Through. And through. And blown about.

With every. Wind of doctrine. And the only. Answer. Is that we should. Grow. In our. Christian. Stability. You see.

The whole link. With verse 30. Till we all. Come. Into the unity. Of the faith. And of the knowledge. Of the son.

[14:37] Of God. In other words. It's only. As we have. A mature. Understanding. Of Christian. Doctrine.

Only. As we have. A secure. Grasp. Of the knowledge. Of the son. Of God. Only. Then. Can we be. Immune. To those. Pressures.

And show. Stability. In the face. Of the changing. Winds of doctrine. That's a challenge. For each one. Of us. To put to himself.

What theological. Progress. Have we made. Since we first. Became. Christians. Christians. I do not. Believe. At all.

That the answer. To the cults. Is to know. What the cults. Teach. To know. Their history. And their development. That may have.

[15:34] Its own relevance. But there are. Too many cults. For that approach. To work. The answer. To the cults. Is to make.

Sure. That we. Ourselves. And all. For whom. We are. Responsible. Have a mature. And intelligent. Understanding. Of the word.

Of God. Those cults. Deny the deity. Of Christ. Do we. Know. The historic. Formulation.

Of the doctrine. Of the deity. Of Christ. Do we know. What the biblical. Proof. Of that doctrine. Is. Do we know.

What the bible. Teaches. With regard. To the way. That Christ. Death saves. Do we know. The bible's message. With a great.

[16:30] With regard. To the question. Of justification. How does a man. Become. Right. With God. What does the bible. Teach. On election.

On predestination. On everlasting. On everlasting. Punishment. What does the bible. Teach. On holy spirit. Baptism. What does the bible.

Teach. With regard. To the lord's day. What does it teach. With regard. To worship. What does it teach. On creation. What does it teach.

With regard. To the nature. Of the bible. Of itself. I am saying. The answer. Is not to know. What the opposition. Teaches.

Because the opposition. Is too varied. The great. Fundamental. And basic answer. Is to know. To know the truth. It is knowledge.

[17 : 29] Of the truth. Adapted. In the spirit's. Wisdom. And skill. To every. Emerging. Situation. It is that alone. That can give stability.

It is only. As we ourselves. Grow. Intellectually. Only as we grow. Doctrinally. Only as we grow. Theologically. Only then. Can we have the stability. That will maintain us. In the face. Of all those. Winds of teaching.

That beat. About the church. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems to me. That in the free church. There is enormous. Theological complacency. We will say. Yes. We may not compare. Very well. With others. In the realm.

[18 : 26] Of evangelism. Or in the realm. Of Christian. Diaconal. Caring. And compassion. But. At least.

We have. The preaching. And we have. The teaching. And we have. The theological knowledge. And in my experience. There is. A colossal. Misunderstanding.

I believe. That there are. Many. Many churches. In this land. To which. We would have. To yield. So far. As the level.

Of insight. Enjoyed. By the people. Into the teaching. Of God's word. Is concerned. I do not. Any longer. Believe. That we are.

A well. Instructed church. I find. Instead. Impatience. With teaching. I find. That we do not.

[19 : 21] Read. Theology. I find. That we are not. Patient of doctrine. I find. That we do not. Pour. Over the word of God. Trying to understand it. And that is. In my view. One. Very significant reason. Why there is such.

A loss. Annually. And why that loss. Of. Adherence. And members. Comes. Very often. At a fairly. High.

Level. Of commitment. In Christian terms. It's not. That we are. Loose. In the uninterested. Only. But that even. Many of those.

Who are converted. To Christ. Through our ministry. Are being lost. Because. What are we? We are. So often. Children. Tossed.

[20 : 16] To and fro. And blown. About. With every. Wind of doctrine. Now. Paul is saying. There are winds. Of doctrine.

There are. What I might call. The winds. Of theological. Change. And. Too many. Christians. Are at the mercy.

Of those winds. We have no rudder. We have no. Earth girl. Because. We are not. Interested. In doctrine.

We are not. Building. A sure. And deep. Foundation. In the formulation. Of truth. For ourselves. We are not.

Meditators. We are not. Biblical. Scholars. We are not. Prepared. To do the work. That has to be done. In order.

[21 : 12] To understand. And what. Baffles me. More. What indeed. Baffles me. Most. Is that. Very often. It is from.

The student. And intellectual. Community. In the free church. That the demand. For simplicity. And the demand.

For. Dramatic. And straightforward. Presentation. Comes. Most consistently. And most. Most incessantly. Is not.

Confined. To the free church. It seems to me. That. No one. Complains. So much. Of the difficulty. Of comprehension. As do students. And I don't.

Understand. That. No one. Is so impatient. Of jargon. In the pulpit. As students. And yet. In their own. Disciplines.

[22 : 06] These students. Readily. And gladly. Master. A jargon. That is at least. Equally complicated. And they never.

Complain. Now in my view. It is the pulpit's business. To make the word of God. Plain. And I hold.

No brief at all. For obscurity. But I have the right. To expect. Diligence. And commitment. To learning.

And to. Recipieship. Especially. On the part. Of those. Who in the providence. Of God. Are gifted. Intellectually. Above the average.

And I am. Just asking. That students. Should apply. To the great business. Of understanding. Of understanding.

[23 : 04] The word of God. The same. Level. Of intellect. And of diligence. And of system. And discipline. As they do. To the other areas.

Of their. Academic interests. And aspirations. That is Paul's. First. Great plea. Grow in stability. So that you will not. Be blown about. With every wind of doctrine. And the only way. To do that. Is to immerse yourselves.

In the word of God. And in the great. Historic. Line. Of orthodoxy. And of reformed theology. That is the first thing. And then secondly. Paul wants them. To grow in unity. Till we all come.

[24 : 01] He says. In the unity. Of the faith. Or as it is. More narrowly. Till we all come. Into. The unity.

Of the faith. We are to grow. Into unity. The. The part of the glory. Of that. Is the paradox. The tension. Between the teaching. Of verse 13. And the teaching. Of verse 3. Because in verse 3. We have this.

We are to endeavor. To keep the unity. Of the spirit. In the bond of peace. There is. There is. One body. In other words.

Paul starts. With the great reality. Of Christian unity. There is. One. Christian church. One body.

[24 : 58] And there is. One spirit. There is. One Lord. There is. One faith. There is. One baptism. That is. The great reality. Now I say.

It is a great reality. I am not saying. Great. For pure. Rhetorical purposes. It is a great reality. That as we gather.

This morning. We are only a tiny. Fragment. A fraction. Of the church. Of the living God. And it should. Fill our hearts. With gladness.

To recall. That all over. Scotland. And all over England. And all over Wales. And Ireland. The Lord's people. Gather in the same way. As we do. To worship.

The same God. Using the same. Word of God. Out of the same. Experience. The same. The same. Aspirations. And principles.

[25 : 53] And commitment. The same. Motivation. And not only that. But that this. Great. Church of Christ. Will today.

Gather internationally. To sing. Praise to God. In every language. In every pigment. In every kind of climate. In every kind of culture.

There is. One body. One body. Within which. Each single member. Owes. Recognition. As a brother. To every other. Single member. One body. And it. Paul says. There only. Is there. Such a unity.

Not only. Must we. Keep. Such a unity. But we. Must. Grow. Into. Such a unity. It is.

[26 : 48] There. And yet. It is. To become. To. Till. We all. Come. Into. The unity. Of the faith. Faith. Now you will notice.

The word. All. Till we. All. Come. In other words. There is no. Concern. At all. To. Minimize. The importance. Of. Personal. Differentials. There we are. Each one of us. In his own. Individuality.

We are not. Robots. We are not. The products. Of some. Mass production. System. We are not. Simply copies. We are. Individuals.

Till we. All. Come. And it is. In my view. One of the. Great needs. Of the church. That we should all be. Content. And be concerned.

[27 : 44] And determined. To be. Ourselves. And to give. To God. The service. That we. Alone. In our own. Personal capacity.

Are able. To give. To. And yet. With all that. For. All this. Fact. Other. Individuality.

We are. To come. Into. The unity. Of the faith. With all. Our own. Rich. Personal. Distinctions. And differences. We are.

To grow. Into unity. And. It is. One of the. Bible's. Imperatives. It is. A thing. That we have. Tended. To minimize. And tended.

To underestimate. And yet. There it is. At the heart. Of Paul's. Concern. With good old. Paul is saying. To us. Why did. God. Give apostles. Why did.

[28 : 39] God. Give prophets. Why did. God. Give evangelists. Why did. God. Give. Pastors. And teachers. Why. To build up. The body.

Of Christ. Till it comes. Into the unity. Of the faith. And of the knowledge. Of the son of God. Let me put it. At a. Narrow. Local level.

What is the function. Of the Christian. Pastorate. By which I mean. Not simply. Our minister. But the collective. Pastorate. Of.

Teacher. And elders. Together. One of their. Great. And overriding. Concerns. Must be. So. To shepherd. And so. To teach. The church.

Of Christ. That the congregation. Grows. Into unity. We may put it. Even more. Dramatically.

Because you see. Again. In verse. 13. Paul says.

[29 : 33] To grow. Into a perfect man. Until the congregation. Is so compacted. Is so coordinated.

That it is. Functioning. As one man. To grow. Into a. Perfect man. That is the concern.

Of the pastorate. That is the concern. Of the Lord's. Intercession. That they. All. May be one. One. He recognizes.

That they are one. He acknowledges. Their deep. Personal. Distinctives. But he wants. Them all.

To grow. Into such a unity.

That at last. They function. As a unit. Now that unity. Is focused. Around. The. Whole. Concept.

[30 : 31] Of truth. In the first instance. It is the unity. Of the faith. And of the knowledge. Of the son of God.

They are growing. Into unity. Around faith. Becoming. More united. Doctrinally.

By discussion. By debate. By argument. By sharing. By study. The great.

Area. Of truth. Which they have. In common. Is being. Constantly. Enlarged. It is not.

Simply. That they are united. Because they all. Hold. Only one. Or two. Doctrines. That they are united.

[31 : 27] Over an ever. Widening. Area. Of Christian truth. United. In the faith. And knowledge.

Of the son of God. Let me go beyond that. United. In affection. In brotherly love.

In concern. One of the great problems. Is that. We find in the churches. That it's only by keeping your distance.

That it's possible to maintain the peace. In the church. In the church. When I was ordained. It was one of the great.

Emphasis. Our inductions. And ordinations. That there must be. A professional distance. Between pastor and people. A view.

[32 : 32] Which in my opinion. Is quite unbiblical. But there it was. It's even more tragic. When the church itself. And the membership of the church.

We are all. Coldly civil. And polite. And courteous. Because there is distance.

And there is the fear. That too close an involvement. Too deep. Too deep a commitment. And too intimate a knowledge. Would jeopardize.

The civility. And the politeness. Too fragile to stand. Let us grow. Into unity of affection.

Where we not only tolerate. Each other. But to like each other. Like each other's company. Share each other's burdens.

[33 : 33] Share. Each other's aspirations. Let's grow. Into the unity. Of the faith. And of the knowledge. Of God's son. Let's grow.

Into the unity. Of affection. It may be above all. There is this. Let us grow. Into that unity. Of which Paul spoke.

To the church at Philippi. With one mind. Striving together. For the faith. Of the gospel. The gospel. In the last two matters. That is the key. The key concern. That theological unity. That is important. And that affectional.

And emotional unity. That too is important. But it is all. In order to this. That we should stand. With one mind.

[34 : 31] Striving together. For the faith. Of the gospel. It is united commitment. To Christian testimony.

To Christian outreach. Standing together. It seems to me. That one great reason. Why we are. So fragmented.

Is that we are. Turned in. Upon ourselves. Rather than. United in concern. For the. Extension. Of God's kingdom. To the world. Divided. Internally. In congregations. Divided. Denomination. Divided. Inter. Denomination. Traditionally. For the evangelical. Witness. Whether you like it.

[35 : 26] Or not. Is tragically. Fragmented. And often fragmented. Quite unnecessarily. And that's why. We are being pushed.

To the perimeter. Of our civilization. That's why. We are cultural. Relevances. In our own time. And place. Because.

Secularism. Is a concerted. Movement. And Romanism. Is a concerted. Movement. And modern. Churchmanship. Is a concerted.

Movement. But evangelicalism. Is a fragmented. Movement. And some of us. Would even love. To have it slow.

And Paul. Is saying. Let's grow. Let's grow. And understanding. And stability. And let us. Grow. In unity.

[36 : 26] And above all. In that unity. By which. We stand. Striving. With one. Mind. For the faith. Of the gospel. There are times. When. We have to. Ignore. Difference. There are times. When. I have to say.

I shall ignore. That problem. In the church. I shall ignore. That problem. In other churches. I shall ignore.

Them. Because. The great thing. Now. Is to. Turn. Our weaponry. Our weaponry. Whether it be. Literary. Or whether it be.

Homiletical. Or academic. Or whatever it is. To turn. Our weaponry. Not. On. Failings. Within our own church.

[37 : 21] Not in failings. Among fellow evangelicals. But to turn. Our weaponry. Upon the whole. Anti-Christian. In conspiracy. Let us stand together.

Striving with one mind. For the faith of the gospel. Let us grow in stability. Let us grow in unity. Let me add to it briefly.

Just one thing more. And that is this. We should grow. In Christ likeness. Till we all come.

In verse 13. Unto the measure. Of the stature. Of the fullness. Of Christ. Or in verse 15.

May grow up into him. In all things. Which is. The head. Even Christ. Now. Sure. That is a tremendous.

[38 : 19] And solemn. Almost overwhelming challenge. The measure. Of the stature. Of the fullness. Of Christ. That he is the model.

The one. We are called upon. To imitate. Let me remind you. How it is. In verse. In chapter 5. Just to show.

How this tremendous. Theology. And Paul. Is able to relate. His mighty principles. In the most. Elementary. Personal. Relationships. Husbands.

Love your wives. As Christ. Love the church. Grow up. Unto him.

In all things. That is the model. That is the destination. Of all our growth. That we should be followers.

[39 : 18] Of God. Imitators. Mimics. Of God. As dear children. Love. As Christ. Love.

As Christ loved. It is applicable. Within marriage. Applicable. In a parent. And child. Child relationship. On both sides. Parents. Love their children.

Children. Love their parents. Masters. And servants. The same. Problem. The same thing. Again. In regard to enemies. Love enemies.

As Christ. Loved his enemies. Grow up. unto him in all things. Go beyond that. And what is perhaps the most terrible thing of all?

Christ the measure of our willingness to be nothing. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who made himself of no reputation made himself nothing.

[40 : 25] Let his glory be obscured. Let his privileges be withdrawn. Let his identity be covered. Let himself be nothing. Misunderstood.

Misrepresented. Unthanked. Unbepared. Unacknowledged. You have stood off my Christian life. I started off longing for reputation as holy.

Art as clever. Art as gifted. I start my ministry hoping one day to be what men call a great preacher. And I come up shudderingly against this model, this man, this image who made himself nothing. Who became an entity who never stood on his dignity, never claimed his rights, never expected gratitude, never expected gratitude, never expected applause, never expected recognition.

[41 : 38] We seek to excel. Do we seek to excel in being nothing? That is not a rhetorical but a profoundly biblical challenge.

He made himself nothing. Grow up into him in all things. We must grow in maturity. We must grow in unity. We must grow in Christ-likeness. And what then, briefly, are the conditions of such growth?

There are two great foundational conditions. First there is this. A man must be in Christ. Well, it's elementary but all preaching is about what's elementary.

Speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things is verse 15 which is the head even in Christ. From whom, in verse 16, from whom the whole body make an increase.

[42 : 47] From whom the whole body grows. Now it is a very solemn question. And it may be a very bold and a very impertinent question to put to such attractive people.

But it must be put, nevertheless, is it possible that the reason for not growing is that we are not joined to the head.

Unless the graft is there, unless there is union with Christ, there is no graft. And I've got to ask, let's check the graft, let's check the union.

between ourselves and Christ individually, between our congregation and Christ collectively. And let us check, not simply, whether there is a real union, but let's check too whether maybe there is some impediment even in what is a real union.

There may be a real marriage between husband and wife. and yet there may be a strain during me. Again.

[44 : 11] Thank you. Thank you.