

Series: *G-R-O-W-I-N-G in Christ*
Message Title: **R**enewal and Maturity Within Biblical Community
Date: Sunday, March 12, 2017
Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-23
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Message series: *G-R-O-W-I-N-G in Christ*

Christian growth and discipleship are much more than the cultivation of personal spiritual disciplines; they are a continual renewal of power based upon the work of God in us, with us, and through us within the church.

We must be careful about any effort to focus on religious discipline and practice that disassociates us from the community life of the church.

Sometimes we so customize and individualize our focus on discipleship (personal maturity), we fail to see it within the larger context of biblical community. (para-church programs)

God uses His church in His redemptive plan and this includes congregational participation for renewal. "A growing Christian is someone whose life is being reshaped by the Spirit of God as the mind is being renewed through the Word of God."

Today, I want us to take time to examine and focus on *Renewal and Maturity Within Biblical Community*.

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ... Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:1, 13, 15, 17-24 ESV).

Previously in this series, we learned that to *Grow Up* means maturity, membership and mission.

The focus here is on our walk with the Lord. Isn't that discipleship? We are followers of Christ—walk worthy, not wayward.

Walk = sphere of life, place of footprints, conduct, behavior, manner, attitude.

This “walk” (found in Ephesians 4:1) is connected to the instruction that precedes “therefore”—doctrine regarding who we are and what we are becoming because of the work of Christ for us:

Chosen for God's Glory	Ephesians 1:3-14
Saved by God's Grace	Ephesians 2:8-10
Empowered by God's Spirit	Ephesians 3:14-21

With this as background and understanding, we are now charged to “walk in a manner worthy of our calling.” But notice, while this is personal in responsibility, it is communal in application. See Ephesians 4:2-3. This is how we are to walk together!



In our walk, we share a need for renewal that God intends, provides and brings through biblical community, the Church.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV).

Renewal and Maturity Within Biblical Community Happen When We are United in...

1. The Love of Christ

This “love” is more than human emotion or feeling; it is a love rooted in our common faith. See Ephesians 3:17-21.

This is not a “Christian Barney” theme song, “I love you, you love me. We’re a happy family...”

The love of Christ calls us out from self-life to servant-hearted living. It changes us in both our attitude and demeanor. See Ephesians 4:2. We become “forbearing”—we bear with one another because some are “bears!”

Forbear is an eagerness to maintain an effort—guarding attitude (disposition): humility, gentleness, patience, working toward peace together. We have to work on us: proud, harsh, impatient.

“Unhealthy churches create dysfunctional Christians.”

Healthy churches depend on the willingness of members to examine their hearts, correct their thinking, and apply their hands to the work of ministry. Love = supported and strengthened.

2. Sound Doctrine

Biblical unity never allows love to disregard or dismiss sound doctrine. While it never negates the reality of diversity among us, it simply unites us in truth. Our unity is rooted in it and built upon more than deeper love—greater truth!

Sadly, so many cries for unity end here: *just love; love wins!* (i.e., God is love). “God loves everybody. We love everybody and if everybody would just love, we would all get along.”

See 1 Corinthians 13:4-6. "[Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6 ESV).

We do not gather to have "experiences" that become our witness of Christ. Rather, we gather to remember, recall, and reflect on the "evidences" that give foundation to our faith.

There is a bond of love within the church that is built upon a unity of doctrine and duty. See Ephesians 4:4-6. You cannot, must not, focus on love as some overarching ambition of affirmation of everyone and everything if you neglect the basis of this instruction: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord (Son), one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. From there, it becomes not just inclusive, but exclusive. He and He alone is over all, through all and in all. Trinity; Tri-unity!!

"Ignorance of God—both of His ways and of the practice of communion with Him—lies at the root of the church's weakness today."

—J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Early Church Formation = Acts 2; witness to the gospel; death, burial and resurrection of Christ. See Acts 2:32, 38, 41-42! Teaching = "doctrine".

We believe the riches found in Scripture will lead to deeper encounters with Christ and the gospel message. We also understand that shared proclamation and participation in worship stirs greater passion for God.

This is why in defining worship, the number one Core Value at Warren is this:

Worship Through the Word!

Worship is the first activity of our church and affects everything we do. We believe all true worship is dependent on the knowledge of God. The Bible is the perfect revelation of God—who He is, what He does, and why He alone is worthy of all worship and praise. We don't worship the God of our imagination, but God revealed in time, history and revelation through the Scriptures. Worship begins and ends with the Word of God reflected in music, prayer and teaching. We gather to confess and celebrate "God is worthy" and depart to live "for His glory."

- **Doctrine is celebrated in our praises.**

We gather to proclaim and celebrate the truth of God as revealed in His Word. This touches every part of the corporate activity of worship.

The issue of music is never style; it is always substance. God has endured a lot of musical styles because of changing cultures through history. Musical styles simply reflect the language of a culture—but the key is not the style, it is the message. What does the music say? Is it biblical or sentimental? Is it truth or error? Is it man-centered or God-focused?

Weak worship is man-centered (similar to emojis), but worship that is God-centered empowers us to live.

Yet, there are moments when we gather and sing, and proclaim together the power of a song, i.e., *A Mighty Fortress is Our God; It is Well With My Soul; In Christ Alone; How Deep the Father's Love; 10,000 Reasons; Bless the Lord, O My Soul*. The truth of God and His grace impacts lives through the collective proclamation of song!

- **Doctrine is Reinforced in Our Prayers**

“God is and God invites us to come to Him and to commune with Him. We seek to have times, places and moments where we pray together. Sometimes prayer touches and renews hearts, and expresses passions like no other.

- **Doctrine is Proclaimed in Our Preaching**

I challenge you to listen, learn and think. I don't have “my inspirational thoughts” to share with you; I have the stewardship of truth entrusted to me. I am either faithful or unfaithful. My job is to preach the Word. See 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

My job is not to make you comfortable or to make your time on the pew enjoyable, but to help you to *think biblically*—not religiously, politically, culturally, progressively, conservatively, etc.

Biblical truth: “...contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3b ESV).

Faith = the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is the gospel? See 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. Gospel-renewal, vital!

“The greatest need in the world is the gospel because men, women and children are perishing without a vital knowledge of God through the Good News of our Savior, Jesus. And the greatest need in the church is the gospel. It is not only news for a perishing world; it is the message that forms, sustains and animates the church.” —Thabiti Anyabwile

This is not an “I’m okay, you’re okay” ideology. The point of this passage has to do with a distinction between those who are saved and called to “walk worthy” and those who “walk in the futility of their minds”. See Ephesians 4:17-19.

Does this mean we only unite with one denomination? One group? No! There are many times and places where we coordinate and cooperate with others, but never to the denial of the testimony of Christ and to the dismissal to the instruction that is evident in Scripture.

Be on guard for any call for unity that disassociates and denies the reality and authority of biblical doctrine.

3. Shared Ministry

See Ephesians 4:7, 11-13. The ministry is not a specialized profession for a select few, but the possession of all members of the body of Christ.

This does not mean there is no specialization, but that all is toward mobilization of the entire body for mission, ministry and maturity.

God renews us through work! See Ephesians 4:12. Common service results in common strength—the result of this mobilization of our lives in ministry. See Ephesians 4:15-16. *Grow Up!*

I don't challenge you to serve because we have a need. You have a need to grow, and you will never grow as long as you consume rather than invest!

God has gifted you not for studying, but to serve. "A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and others in such away that God is glorified and believers are edified."

—Warren Wiersbe

“grow to build itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16b).

God transforms us through the demands and challenges of service for Christ. Far too many have spiritual atrophy.

4. Fashionable Witness

Ephesians 4:20-24.

We are on the cusp of a fashion change in these days. Why? Changing seasons (soon boots will vanish and sandals will appear). The dark earthly hues and heavy fabrics that marked the arrival of fall and winter are put away and the bold/bright colors of spring will reappear.

This helps us all understand about “putting off” and “putting on”. See Ephesians 4:20-24. What’s fashionable for believers? Our new garments are robes of “righteousness” and footwear of “holiness”.

We seek spiritual fashion that goes far beyond a new image, but one that reflects our new identity (2 Corinthians 5:17) consistent with life that is in Christ!

“True” = not some knock off, but that which is authentic; not self-righteousness, but that which is becoming of our Savior, the Righteous and Holy One, Jesus.

Collectively our fashion is one of bright illumination of the glory of Christ.

(Show photo of Christmas Eve Candlelight Service.) Matthew 5:16—renewal in demonstration and action!