

Growing Up

Blueprint: God's Design for the Church

Ephesians 4:11-16

If you are a regular here, your Bible probably just opens to the book of Ephesians, so go ahead and be finding Ephesians chapter 4. In the early 1980's, a church that was celebrating its 90th anniversary year had just had their pastor resign and leave. So the church was in that transition period where they were getting ready to call another pastor. But the pastor who had left had been at that church about fifteen plus years, so it was kind of a hard transition time for the church. So they finally, after much prayer, began to talk to a young man about possibly considering coming to be their pastor. And in the midst of those interviews, in the midst of all of them praying together, one of the pulpit committee members said to the young man, "If you become our pastor, what would you do to keep our church from splitting?" See, the fear was like most churches, because when pastors change churches, sometimes they go somewhere in the community, so there was a fear that because he was so loved, been there so long, that possibly some of the members would leave the church and go with him. The young man just said, "I can't guarantee you I can keep the church from splitting, but if you call me to be your pastor, here's what I promise. I'll help us build the church on the basis of Ephesians chapter 4:11-16, because I believe that's God's blueprint for how to build a church."

Now, it just so happens that I've been in Nicaragua with the team and as I came home, Chris had preached up to verse 10, and I get to start in verse 11-16. Here's what's amazing; that church will now celebrate, this fall, its 125th anniversary, and that young man who that church called at the time was 22, just celebrated his 57th birthday in the country of Nicaragua. I can't tell you what a privilege it is this morning to stand before you after coming home with our team and to have celebrated my birthday in Nicaragua. But what I'm most thankful for this morning is that this church,

almost 35 years ago, gave me the opportunity to come and be its pastor. I made a commitment to the pulpit committee that I've tried to honor, and that's that this church would be built on the model of God's Word according to Ephesians 4:11-16, because in this pastor's opinion, that's God's blueprint on how to build a church. Now some of the original members, (not 125 years, but when I was called here) are still here. I can't tell you how many times we've opened our bibles as we're going to open this morning and look at this passage. Now if you've been at Hardin for the last 10, 15 years, you know that when we've turned to this passage we always remind the church that the main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing. If you heard us preach on this passage, you know that we read verses 11-16, but we never get past verse 12. Almost 35 years ago when I came to Hardin, I could preach this entire paragraph in about fifteen minutes. And now, after you've given me forty plus minutes, I can hardly get past verses 11 and 12. This morning, because of how much we've preached this passage to this church, I want to put more emphasis on verses 13-16, but remind you of what it also says in verses 11 and 12. But this morning, we're not going to title this 'The Main Thing is to Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing.' I mean, the main thing is still to keep the main thing, the main thing, but this morning the title of our message is going to be, 'Growing Up.'

Would you stand with me now as we read from Ephesians 4:11-16? Just in case you know, from time to time in the community, somebody will say, "Bro Ricky, how long have you been at Hardin?" And I will say, always do this, no matter what time of the year it is, I'll say, "If they let me stay to the first Sunday of May..." then I add a little bit of time. I pray you'll let me stay to the first Sunday of May, and if you do, I'll celebrate 35 years of being your pastor. Some of you have seen me grow up in your presence, and what an honor it is to get to share one of my favorite, favorite passages of Scripture, probably the most favorite concerning the church.

Scripture

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to

the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, 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."

(Prayer)

Father, one more time, we ask for your blessing on the reading of Your Word. Father, what we're really asking for is as we listen for Your Holy Spirit to just do only what You can do, and that's open our ears; open our hearts and our minds to hear spiritually. We have an advantage that unbelievers don't have, and that's we get to hear from You. Your Spirit just bears witness with our spirit. Sometimes You are giving us confidence, but other times You are convicting us about behavior in our lives that doesn't line up with what we say we believe to be true about You. So Father, we want all that to happen this morning. We want You to be in control, and when we go out of here, we don't want to be hearers only. We don't want to be speaker only. We want to be doers of Your Word. So Father, now in the twenty-seven minutes or so that we have, please give us the ability to summarize this paragraph in a way that's profitable to Your people. It's in Your Son's name we pray, amen.

If you were with us a few weeks back before we left, we reminded you we're beginning the 4th chapter, which introduces us to the last half of the letter. And in the last half of this letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul is balancing behavior with belief. In the first three chapters, he has told us time and time again about what God has done for us in Christ. Now, as he begins chapter 4, he takes the picture of the ancient balance and he puts our calling to be a member of the church on this side of the balance, and

he puts us on this side and gives us a command to balance the scale. Then he tells us how. He tells us the attitudes and actions we are to have. Can I just give an invitation right now? How are you doing? Do you personally have enough lead in your britches, spiritually, to balance the scales?

Chris, last week, (I know it was a snow Sunday; I hated that) shared with us how in the church there was both a unity and a diversity. Unlike how Chick-fil-a can actually be commonness to Auburn and Georgia fans, we're not tied together by chicken; we're tied together by lamb, amen, the Lamb of God. Chris challenged us not to be a customer of the church, but to realize we are employees of the church. You will remember as he come to those last verses, all of this is based on what God's done for us in Christ and what He's doing in His body through the Holy Spirit of God, and when Christ ascended back to the right-hand throne of God after He defeated the grave sin and Satan, when He got back to the right-hand side of God, He gifted the church.

That's where we're at this morning. It says "He..." now, I love what the King James says, "He, Himself gave some," meaning what? Christ Jesus Himself, by virtue of His victory, gave some of His churches apostles, He gave some of His churches prophets, and He gave some of His churches evangelists. But as the churches began to be planted in all communities, and the churches began to grow, He knew there was another gift of leadership that was needed, and that was they needed pastor/teachers. Now for years, some Christians thought that there were five leadership gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. It's not true. As a matter of fact, if you'll look in your Bible this morning, it says He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, not the teachers.

Why is that important? Paul's trying to show that the last gift given to the church is the shepherd who teaches the sheep. So we recognize that the church has been gifted with leaders and those leaders are here to equip the saints to do the work of ministry, and that it's the work of ministry that edifies the body of Christ, and as I've stood before you for years, I've challenged us to keep the main thing, the main thing. And if I, as a pastor, keep the main thing, the main thing, here's what will happen to me; I will

recognize that I'm here as a gift from God to the church, and what I'm here to do is to have a teaching and preaching ministry that equips the saints to do what God's called them to do, and that's the work of ministry. If you're new to Hardin, you're going to understand this, you're going to shy away from it probably at first, but it'll settle in and it'll be glorious. The favorite expression Paul has for believers in Christ. If you are a believer in Christ, would you raise your hand? Do you know what his favorite description of you is? Do you know what his favorite description of us is? We are saints of God. That word, saint, means we've been set apart. It means we're holy. It means we've been set apart from a life of sin and selfishness to a life of salvation in Christ, where we live our life, not for the glory or the pleasure of ourselves, but we live our life for the glory of another, and that other is God Himself. If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be here. I just happen to believe in the providence of God, and the sovereignty of God, and I think even almost 35 years ago, God knew you'd be here at this very moment. I'm here to equip you. This word, equip, is a Greek word picture. It was used various ways in the Greek world, but the one I like most; this word was used to talk about the process of getting a ship ready to sail.

Can I ask you this question? When you think about your relationship to those people sitting around you, Evie Kate will learn later on that this building is not the church. This building is just our meeting place. We're the church; we're the body of Christ. So let me ask you this question; do you view church as a ship? And if you do, what kind of ship comes to your mind? Do you view us as a cruise ship? Recently I've had some people who have said to me, "Ricky, as much as your family loves going to Disney, you need to take Disney cruise." Now I've got to be totally honest with you, I don't know if I'll ever go on a Disney cruise or not because I just can't imagine me being confined on a ship with twelve, fifteen hundred people and them have enough space and people for that trip to be all about me and all about my family. I can go to the place in Orlando, and from the time I go in until the time I leave, wow, it's all about me! Mickey knows my name; Minnie gives me a hug every time I go! Wow! Sometimes she tells some of ya'll when I haven't been in a few months to tell Bro Ricky hi! Boy, I'm just worried about being on a cruise ship, confined in a small amount

of space, having to share a space with somebody, and the captain know this is really all about me. You know what I discovered. I didn't discover this until just a few months back when I was preaching to pastors at the Kentucky Baptist Convention, and I was preaching this and it was almost as if the Holy Spirit gave me things to say that I'd never said before, and all of a sudden, I realized what was going on. See, if you look at the church as a cruise ship, the reason you believe it's all about you is because you believe you are a passenger. Yeah! As a passenger, it is all about you. It's all about you. Sorry, I'm sorry, God did not call me here to be a director of a spiritual cruise ship. We are a cargo ship, and there's a difference. If you're on a cruise ship, the emphasis is the passengers, but if you're on a cargo ship, the emphasis is the cargo. The emphasis is taking the cargo that's been placed in the belly of the ship, and everybody that's on the ship is there for one reason and it's not about them, it's about the cargo and it's about getting the cargo to every port to which that cargo is destined. Amen. Therefore, hear me say this; God's blueprint for His church is not for us to be a cruise ship where it's about us, it's about us being a cargo ship where it's about the cargo and Jesus Christ and us realizing there are people who do not know Him and us delivering that gospel, not just to a coffee village in Nicaragua, but to our neighbors, to those we work with, to those we play with, and those we recreate with.

If that's true, then here's what will dawn on us; there are no passengers, there's the cargo and there's a crew. Can I ask you this question? Next Sunday, if when we pass the attendance clipboard down and you sign it, if we have two columns, passenger, or crewmember, which way would you sign? Which way would you sign? You being part of us: is it being about the gospel and others, or is it about you? I want to tell you what's dawned on me the last ten years of my life as I pastor this church. I've never personally been hurt by the church, but I've been hurt by Christians. Listen to me; some folks don't recognize the difference. So that when you hurt them as a Christian, they hold all of us responsible! It's hard to deliver the cargo to somebody who was hurt by the previous crewmember who didn't act like who he or she was. Verses 1-16 form a unit of thought. Me and Chris have had to break it up into three sections: being a member of the body, a cargo ship, and now, your life. Are you balancing the scales? That's

why I'm here, to help you recognize God's gifted you because you're a saint of His, and you're here for a purpose and the purpose is to do the work of ministry. Then that work of ministry that you and I do together, it builds up the body of Christ. Have you ever noticed at Hardin that we've never had a sign and at the bottom of the sign, it says who are minister is, Bro Ricky? Have you ever noticed that? There's a reason. I don't want you to believe I'm the minister at Hardin Baptist Church. I'm not; I'm the pastor, I'm the shepherd. As the pastor/shepherd, I'm a saint like you and I have a work of ministry. Do you know who the ministers are at Hardin? All of us. All of us. You say, "But Bro Ricky, I haven't joined yet." It doesn't matter! You've been coming long enough. I mean, if you hang out with us a couple of weeks, everybody in the community thinks you're Hardin. Amen. As a matter of fact, some of you were warned not to come here, right? Well, you came anyway! Something is holding you here. We pray it is the Holy Spirit of God. You've tried to get away; God won't let you! You're valuable to us; you're a minister. See, God didn't just give you a spiritual gift, He's got a ministry for you and Kory, and Chris, Nick, Chris, Matt, Abbey, Shelley, and they want to help you, not just find a place inside these walls when we meet together, but find a place outside these walls to minister.

Guys, I've been doing this thirty-five years. Here's the question this morning; how long is Bro Ricky going to keep doing this? I want to tell you something. There's a rumor in the community (I just want you to know this) that I'm getting ready to retire. I am just fifty-seven. I'm not even close to retiring, so if some of you think you're going to stay until I retire, you're going to be here a long time. Now get this picture. As the pastor/teacher is going to try to keep the main thing, the main thing, the Bible doesn't say until you turn sixty-five! It says until "we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Do you know what that means? That means I've got to stay here doing what I'm doing until we all come to the same place, not part of us, all of us. You, individually, are us. Please let that dawn on you. I am us. I'm a part of something bigger than me, so my actions, my behavior, should balance out the scale

of being a member of the body of Christ, a cargo ship, until we all come, until we all obtain.

In the Greek world, this word was used to talk about coming to a place, a meeting place, where everybody was going to meet. You know this; last Friday it looked bad. Kory was on the phone and he was calling all the teen members, and we were praying through what we were going to do because it did not look like we could get to Hardin to meet to go to Nashville to catch a plane to Atlanta to catch a plane to Managua to drive four 4-wheel drive vehicles to the mountain region of Nicaragua. And we desperately wanted to go. We didn't want to leave anybody out. So we prayed and we called the airline, and we tried to change our plane flight to Sunday. So then, all of us, (because some of us live out in the boonies, so to speak) so we would all come to the same place, Hardin's parking lot, to leave, and God closed every door. We had made a commitment as a team; we weren't going unless everybody was going. We all had to get to Hardin, and we did. That's the picture here. Now when I got here, there were some already here. I'm so thankful the ones didn't leave us that got here first. Then after I got here, there were others who got here after I got here. That's the picture. We won't all get to where we're supposed to be at the same time, but none of us is going to quit on the rest of us until we all come to the unity of the faith in the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the statute of the fullness of Christ.

Unity again. This isn't talking about until we all become believers, until we all put our personal faith in Christ; it's talking about those core beliefs we have, you can just call that the faith. That's why at Hardin we have tried to build the church, not on anything but the preaching and teaching ministry of God's Word, whether it be from the pulpit, or a Sunday school class, or in a small group, or our members at home in the Word. Through the years, I've got to be honest with you; there are a lot of people who have said we don't want to be here, because they don't believe what we believe. But as we keep teaching and preaching, all of a sudden, you're going to begin to understand, wow, there are some things that church believes are essential, and we want you to come to that unity with us. It matters what you believe. Hardin pledges to you we'll never get caught up into that

movement where we just have a meeting to meet the needs of the people and there not be a solidifying foundation. Many of those movements have already crumbled because it matters what we believe, and God has given us a core set of beliefs that we must believe, and, come to the knowledge of the Son of God. Knowledge, here, isn't talking about knowing who He is only. It's talking about who He is and then having a desire to go into a deeper relationship with Him. Did you hear that? If you're going to help us be who we need to be, you, in balancing the scales, you've got to work on your relationship with Christ. I've got to work on my relationship with Christ. We've got to be intimate with Him. And guess who we've got to be intimate with? We're getting to be intimate with the Son of God.

I have a friend, he knows the son of the owner of the Chicago Bears. That's just cool. Can you imagine knowing somebody who owns an NFL football team? Now, when me and him talk and I'm always bringing it up, he don't brag about it, but I'm always inquiring about the Bears and about professional football. And when I talk to him, I mean, do you know who his daddy is? His daddy owns the Bears, and he's the son of the owner! It's almost as if when I'm talking to this guy who knows the son, it's almost as if he knows the father too because he knows the son! Do you get it? God lets us be in a relationship with His Son, so that by knowing His Son, we know Him, to mature manhood.

Do you remember Ephesians 2:15? God decided He no longer wanted Jews and Gentiles only, He wanted a new race living among the Jews and the Gentiles, so He created a new race of people, and that's the church. I don't mind saying this; you and I live in a racist society. The world is racist toward the church because we're a race. You know that right. I've got to be totally honest with you, it's going to run some of you off, I can't help it; I don't like what's going on in our country. I don't like how some Christians are being aligned with this and other Christians are being aligned with that because they are aligned to a party, politically. It hurts the name of Christ. We're supposed to think differently within our party affiliation from our party. I don't care which party you're in! Yes, we're proud to be an American, but we are Christians living in America and we are the new race of people. If God's going to bring redemption to America, it will not

through our government, it will be through His church in America! Mature manhood. He builds a new man in Ephesians 2, and by the time he gets to Ephesians 4, he's telling us he wants us to be mature, not immature. You start out in the infant stage, you go to being a child, and you go to being an adolescent, now we've got to come in as you college kids. I mean, you're not an adult yet, but you're not an adolescent, you're in college, then we start adulthood. That was not a slur. It's just modern society has invented something they didn't have for years. So here's what we've got to figure out, what kind of body are we, a baby, a child, an adolescent, college students, or are we mature? See, when we all come to the unity of the faith in the knowledge of the Son of God, we come to mature manhood, but he doesn't stop there. See, the Jewishness in Paul was used to Hebrew parallelism and poetry where you just build line upon line upon line upon line, and all of a sudden you start down here and you end up here, and he ends up here by saying "through the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

When I read this, I can't help this being a Cunningham, being raised as a kid, I remember my great-grandfather, and he was a big guy but he married a little bitty woman. All of their kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids, we didn't get the gene from Papa; we got the gene from Grandmother, which means we're short. I always wanted to be bigger than I was. Does anybody else have the short complex like me? I always wanted to be bigger. Thank you. Can I ask you tall people do any of you tall people; did you ever while you were growing up want to be short? No. but we short people want to grow taller; we want to grow up! I remember as a kid wanting to be as big as so and so; he was six foot two! So on the closet doorpost of my bedroom, I had a measure that was six foot two, and I would stand up on it and I'd measure, but I never made it.

Here's the measure; it's the fullness of Christ. Which means, what? If you are a true member of this church, your desire ought to be for us, as a church in this community, to be big as Christ is! Why? Because here is what you know, this is what I labor for, this is what I agonize over, and this is what I pray for as a pastor, as a shepherd/teacher; first, to understand the responsibility in this community. In this community, we are

the visible, living presence of Christ. As He walked in Nazareth, and as He walked in Jerusalem, and as He walked in Galilee, He still walks in Hardin, and He still walks in Dexter. He walks where we're at, and He walks through us. We are His body. He taught people, He healed people, He loved people, He rebuked people; that's who we are! That's our identity; we are the body of Christ. Then he tells us why he wants us to grow up; so we wouldn't be children tossed to and fro by every wave, by every wind, by people who are part of the church. But they're cunning, they're crafty, they're deceitful, but they've come into your life, they've come into my life, and if we're children, if we're infantile, if we're babies; this word, children, means one who does not speak. It's the picture of a little baby. We're going to be over here, and we're going to be over there, over there, and over here. Paul says but rather grow up into Him, who is the head from whom the whole body joined and held together, by which every part supplies when each part is working properly, makes the body grow in love. Did everybody catch that? I've got to grow up, you've got to grow up; we've all got to grow up into Him, who's the head.

Then once we grow up in Him who is the head, we recognize I'm a part of something bigger than me, and without me, we can't be who God's called us to be. Please tell me you heard that. Did you hear that? We can't be who we're supposed to be without me. That's what everybody's got to see. That's what everybody's got to believe. You've got to believe you're a part of it, and then when every part is working properly, I promise you this. I see this on a weekly basis almost, some of you have come in here and you're hurt, you're injured; we are going to give you time to heal. We really will. You've got to let us know if you just have a sprain, or if you had a replacement part surgery. But we need you; we need to recognize you are a part and then we need you to be the part. We need you to work effectively in your area of giftedness and in your area of ministry. Why? So that this body can grow. Numerically, no, that's not what the Bible says. Do we want to grow numerically? Absolutely. Why? Because there are people who don't know Christ.

Now can I just say this? For those of you who have come in recently, Hardin never added other services so more people would come. We always

added services because we couldn't hold the people that were already coming. Did you catch that? We never got satisfied. It would have been a whole lot easier on me if we got satisfied about twenty-five years ago. I pray we never get satisfied. I pray you never sit down with seeing the seat in front of you is empty and seeing the seat behind you is empty, and the seat beside you is empty, and in your wildest dream you wonder about that sinner in the community who one day, like you, might be redeemed from their sin and sits beside you in a worship service at Hardin, and see their life change in front of you and God used you in their life. But catch this; makes the body grow up in love.

Now I left out a key phrase that some of you are thinking now hold it Bro Ricky, you left out, 'speak the truth in love.' Because some of you believe you speak the truth in love when you really don't. You're mean, you're harsh, and then at the end of the speech you tack on, 'I love you.' No. As a matter of fact, the words, speak the truth, isn't even in our Bible in this passage, but it's a Greek verb that's hard to translate into English because it really means, truthing it. If we have we got any grammar teachers in here, I just got in trouble because that's not a word, right, 'truthing it.' But here's what it means; I'm supposed to live a life in truth. I'm supposed to live a life based on the core doctrines that's been taught to me. I'm supposed to live a life that's based on my intimacy with Christ Jesus, and I life that out. When I life that out, I do it in the realm of love. I'm not doing it for me; I'm doing it for others. So when this body begins to grow, we grow in love.

Can I remind you what Jesus said? A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you. And, when you love others as I have loved you, the world will know you are my disciples. I'm not asking you if you believe you're a disciple, but what I'm asking you is, do your friends believe you're a disciple? Does the teacher of your child at school believe you're a disciple? Does the man you work for believe you're a disciple? Do the men or women who work under you believe you're a disciple? We need to grow up, but we can't grow up until each of us grows up. We're going to wait for you, and we're going to defend you because you're us.

My sign says time's up. I know it's up. I hear the natives in the foyer. Do you hear them to? They want your seat, but could we bow our heads and close our eyes. I promise you that eternally, the church is the most important thing you belong to because when you belong to the church, you belong to Christ. You're His body. This is the reason some of us work where we work. This is why some of us recreate where we recreate, because God didn't just love you and want you to be a part of us; He wanted to love those other people in your life through you, not just as a Christian, but as a crewmember of the cargo ship of Hardin Baptist Church. If you're here this morning and you say whoa, Bro Ricky, I've been coming for the wrong reasons. I thought the church was about me. You can turn in your ticket to us of being a passenger and you can say I want to be a part of the crew, but just know here's where I'm at and I'll promise you, we will wait on you. We'll wait, and we'll be patient, but our goal is for all of us to come to this place to where we can be as big as Christ in our area.