

Your Part In God's Community

Ephesians 4:14-16

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

Introduction

Yesterday I read an article by a sociologist titled 'The Children Who Won't Grow Up'. It looked at a phenomenon called 'Peter Pan-demonium' where kidults, boomerang kids, and lost boys and girls were hanging on the edge of adulthood. What we see in society and culture today is a generation of young adults and professionals who live like children.

Consider these examples:

- 28-year-old John Russell is a well-paid lawyer who says he isn't interested in doing 'adult stuff'. He loves his PlayStation and spends a considerable portion of his disposable income on hi-tech toys.
- Fred Simons and Oliver Bailer, both estate agents in their late twenties, play with their Nintendo and boast that they haven't changed much since their school years.
- Helen Timerman, a 27-year-old designer, proudly shows me her collection of soft toys. She loves cuddling them and believes that her little animals, neatly arranged in her bedroom, give her a zone of security.
- Kate Stevens, a 27-year-old American teacher who is looking for an adult man, tells me about men in San Francisco who, "when they are not playing with themselves are off playing with their gadgets". She talks of "grown-up men racing home to play computer games before hitting the streets with their micro-scooters".
- In New York, twenty- and thirty-somethings buy products that remind them of their childhoods. On the corner of Bleecker St and West 11th St, they stand patiently in line outside the Magnolia Bakery for their fix of yellow cupcake with chocolate icing and sprinkles. In Dylan's Candy Bar, twenty-somethings loiter around Pez dispensers and a giant lollipop tree.

Two US advertisers, Becky Ebenkamp and Jeff Odiorne, have coined the term Peter Pan-demonium to describe this trend. It's called Peter Pan-demonium and is based on the story of Peter Pan. Peter Pan was the boy who never grew up, and that's what we're seeing more and more of today in young adults from London, to San Francisco, to NY, to Sydney.

The same trend exists in the church, a spiritual Peter Pan-demonium. Paul says they are believers who have never grown up. As you come to v.14, Paul gives us a picture of what an immature believer looks like; what you find is the contrast between maturity and growth (v.13) and immaturity and childishness. They are believers who live like children in v.14.

Paul's Expectation is Growth for Believers v.14a

The contrast Paul draws is between the maturity and growth that believers are to grow into (v.13), and the Peter Pan-demonium state that they are to grow out of, i.e. the immaturity they are to grow out of (v.14). So you read in v.14 that Paul's purpose in encouraging us to use our gifts to help make Jesus our shared treasure is - v14, *so that we may no longer be*

children, so that in the Christian life we may not remain where we are in a state of infancy, so that as believers we may grow out of our immaturity.

In all of life growth is the norm, growth is the expectation, and maturity is the desired goal. You don't plant things in your garden expecting them to shrivel and die; you expect them to grow, and blossom, and bear fruit. You don't raise children expecting them to physically and emotionally be where they are today, ten years from now. You don't work a job or pursue a career not expecting to progress or develop professionally. You don't go to uni expecting to stay in first year for the rest of your life. You don't invest in a property expecting it to depreciate or retain its value after 15 years; you expect it to grow in its value. In all of life growth is the norm, growth is the expectation, and maturity is the desired goal that we expect and pursue.

And it's no different in the Christian life; yet so many of us are satisfied to live in a state of stagnancy, of infancy, and of immaturity, not realizing that something is wrong. Maturity in the Christian life is measured not by the number of years you have been at church, or the number of ministries you have served in, but by v.13 – *whether you growing in a shared love for Jesus and a knowledge of Jesus with others, and whether Jesus is the supreme treasure who fills and satisfies you in life.* The trajectory of maturity for the believer is always towards Jesus (Col.2:6-7). **If that's not happening then something is wrong.**

If the plants in your garden are dying or not growing, you act. If your child is losing weight or not gaining weight, you see a doctor. If your relationship with your spouse has grown cold or has not grown, you work to renew those affections. If your investments are falling or stagnating, you rework them. In all of life, when there is no growth, it's not just unacceptable to us but it's also sometimes dangerous, and so we act. Yet the great tragedy is that we find it acceptable in our Christian lives, we are satisfied to live in a state of stagnancy week after week, month after month, and year after year when it comes to Jesus. Something is wrong.

Paul's Picture of Immaturity v.14b

And so here in v.14 is a picture of the immaturity that we're to not just reject but also grow out of. For this is a picture of what children tend to be like, a picture of immaturity – ***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.***

This is Paul's picture of a spiritual immaturity: someone who is unstable and ignorant, someone who is fickle and gullible, and someone who is easily swayed and believes everything. Like a boat without an anchor in a stormy sea, at the mercy of the wind and the waves, is what immaturity looks like. Wherever the wind blows I go, and wherever the surf takes me I go, tossed to and fro by the waves, and carried around by shifting winds. And the reason why they are immature or unstable is because they are easily influenced by every wind of doctrine – *they are tossed to and fro by the waves and swept away by every wind of teaching.*

Unstable, Fickle, Easily Swayed Away From Jesus

Firstly, what is this wave of teaching that sways them? What is this wind of teaching that carries them along? It's anything that leads them away from the goal of maturity in v.13. It's any teaching that takes them away from making Jesus their shared treasure (their unity around Jesus), it's any teaching that takes them away from growing to know Jesus more and more (their knowledge of Jesus), it's any teaching that takes them away from being

consumed, filled, and satisfied with Jesus in their lives as everything to them, and it's any teaching, belief, philosophy, worldview, or way of life that is going to substitute Jesus and His redeeming work as a treasure in their life for something else.

In Colossians 2:22, Paul warns the Colossian Christians that Jesus, and His redeeming work, is sufficient for them in life. You are saved by grace, and you died with Christ, so why do you live as though your salvation depended on your performance or work? Paul calls this a human or fleshly or worldly teaching. It is like a man who has a multi-million dollar inheritance but slaves like a dog to earn a living. Jesus is your inheritance, so as a believer, you living as if your salvation depended on your performance is taking you away from Jesus!

You read a similar warning in Acts 20:29-30. Paul is about to leave the Ephesians church and his last words are – *leaders, keep watch over the church bought with the blood of Jesus. Wolves are going to come in among you and will ravage the flock – and some among you will distort the truth to draw people away from Jesus to them – they will distort the truth to draw away disciples to themselves.*

The immature are swept away by every and any kind of teaching that takes them away from Jesus as their shared treasure with others, to be united around something or someone else. The immature are blown over by every and any kind of teaching that moves them away from growing to know Jesus and His love more and more, and having that replaced with something else that they grow to know and love instead. They are unstable, fickle, and easily swayed away from Jesus in life!

Ignorant, Gullible, Easily Deceived

Secondly, Paul says that like children, they're also ignorant, gullible, and easily deceived. They are *tossed around and swept away by other people's cunning*. And like the wind of teaching that carries them away from Jesus, people with deceptive words and people with foolish advice also move them away from Jesus. The problem with the immature is that they are gullible, listening to what people are saying in their lives, and taking on board what people are advising them in their lives. They often don't see that it's taking them away from Jesus. In small steps they are moving them away from treasuring Him, knowing Him, and being filled with and satisfied in Him!

In Colossians 2:8, Paul's warning to the Colossian believers, which is still a danger even now, is - *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ*. The warning is to not end up a captive to people's deceptive wisdom in life, and to not end up a captive to people's empty advice in life which is not grounded in Jesus, i.e. wisdom that depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world. Any advice that claims to be good advice, but is grounded in my experience or worldly values is foolishness. If it's not grounding you in Jesus and his word, his ways, it is deceptive wisdom because it is grounding your life in something other than Jesus. You can't grow if you're not building on Jesus. You're being deceived if you're being told to build on something else in life, and you're being deceived if you're being advised to find your security, hopes, and treasure in anything other than Jesus! The immature are easily deceived; whatever they hear they take on board, even if it's taking them away from Jesus.

Paul uses the same word in 2 Corinthians 11:3 in speaking of the '*cunning*' of the devil, whose intent is to lead our thoughts astray, and to lead our thinking astray; away from a

sincere and pure and untainted devotion to Jesus, and to lead our thinking away from being single-mindedly devoted to Jesus. And let's be honest, most of what we hear in our lives, the advice we get, what we're taught in our universities and schools, what we hear through the media, the things we hear from our friends and family, and the kind of encouragement we get from people at church, is often not designed to move us towards Jesus but in the opposite direction. Almost everything we hear in our lives is not designed to help us resolutely set our hearts and minds on Jesus as our treasure to be known, and to be satisfied with. The mature realize this but the immature just go along with what they hear, they are easily enticed.

This is also why Paul says that the immature are easily captured by the devil's craftiness and his deceitful schemes (v.14, *tossed around and swept away by craftiness in deceitful schemes*). The NIV treats them as one and the same but the ESV doesn't – *by human cunning and by craftiness in deceitful schemes*). Paul will go on to tell us in Ephesians 6:11 that it's the devil who schemes against us as believers; so here we're told that it's the immature who will fall prey to the devil's schemes. There is a supernatural being who works endlessly to deceive us, who actively seeks to draw us away from Jesus (1 Peter 5:8 – like a roaring lion seeking to devour you). So real is this reality; Paul speaks of the entire Christian life as a battle against the devil's schemes in ch.6: our struggle is not against flesh and blood; it's not a physical one but it's a spiritual one! Paul tells us to put on the armor of God to fight him.

The Key to Fighting Immaturity is Fighting for Maturity

But here in ch.4, the solution, key, way to overcome the devil's scheme, way to not fall for the lies of people around us whose words redirect our thinking and hearts away from Jesus, and the way to not be swayed by every teaching we hear that substitutes for Jesus, is to grow in Jesus. **The key to fighting immaturity is fighting for maturity. The key to fighting immaturity is to pursue maturity.**

The key to a stagnating Christian life is to work on growing. It holds true for children, and it holds true for the Christian life. The more you are growing with others in your shared love for Jesus, the more you are growing in your knowledge of Jesus as your thinking is shaped by an understanding of Him, His work, and His words, and as He fills your life more and more, the more you will be unmovable, unshakeable, stable, and discerning. You'll hear the advice people give you and you'll know whether it's God honoring advice that will move you towards Jesus, you'll listen to your friends talk about what they treasure in life and you'll know whether it's a treasure that is going to replace Jesus in your life, and you'll watch TV and the values and ideals that are put forward and you'll know whether they are values and ideals that ground you in Jesus.

The only way to combat immaturity in the Christian life is to grow in maturity. A child remains unstable, fickle, gullible, and ignorant until he grows. A weak muscle is not strengthened unless it is used. Healthy results don't come about without exercise. Stagnant water remains stagnant until it is disturbed and stirred. The Christian life is the same.

1 Timothy 4:7 tells you to train yourself for godliness, and to discipline yourself for godliness; v.15 tells you to practice these things, the things that are going to foster a love and knowledge of Jesus in your life; immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. In all of life we strive to be good at what we do. In all of life we work to know as much as we can about the things that interest us. In all of life we work to increase our skill and experience in the things that we enjoy **because the more we grow in the things we enjoy, the more we enjoy them**, how else do we grow? **Growth brings joy**, and it's the only way

you grow to enjoy something, by growing in it, and the same applies in the Christian life. **Growing to treasure Jesus will lead to maturity, which will bring ever increasing joy in Him.**

So make it your discipline to feed and fuel your heart, mind, and soul with Jesus, immersing yourself in the disciplines of prayer, study, meditation, and real fellowship! **Why is it such a strange thing to do?** Do you consider it strange going to the gym? Of course not! It's the means to physical health, and those are the means that bring you joy and delight in being fit. Do you consider it strange to do a barista course to improve your coffee making skills? Of course not! It's the means to making better coffee, and those are the means that bring you joy and delight in better coffee. Do you consider it strange researching and reading up on your favourite celebrity or band? Of course not! It's the means to knowing your favourite celebrity or band, and those are the means that bring you joy and delight in your favourite celebrity or band.

As believers, these are the spiritual means to growth that will bring you joy and delight in Jesus. **The way to combat immaturity is to pursue maturity, i.e. growth!**

The Gifts are Given to Bring about Maturity – vv.12 -> v.13

And this is how you fight for maturity in this passage, **by using the gifts God has given you, by pursuing the gifts God has given you, and by being equipped to use the gifts Jesus has given you.**

This is how our gifts fit in God's scheme of growth and maturity in our lives. The gifts are given to each one of you to be used in helping each other grow to maturity. **Maturity and growth is actually a family affair and not an individual affair.** The gifts are given to each one of you to help each other grow to make Jesus our shared treasure, to increase in our knowledge of Him, and to be filled and satisfied with Him in our lives. They are - v. 12, equipping you for the work of ministry so that we might all be built up to – v.13, have Jesus as our shared treasure (unity), that we are growing in knowledge of Him, and to be filled with Him. Because the more Jesus fills your life, heart, thinking, and vision, the more you will stand secure as a believer.

I want to say to you that two kinds of church communities are revealed in this passage (vv.12-14). There is a contrast drawn between a mature church and an immature one; the contrast between a healthy church and an unhealthy one, and a growing family and a stagnating family.

It's striking that the Bible never measures a church's maturity, strength, power, or health by (1) its music; (2) its gifts; (3) its pastor; (4) its size; (5) what kind of ministries it offers; or (6) its building. The Bible measures a church's maturity by the measure by which all God's people are being equipped to serve, and are actually serving to make Jesus their shared treasure as a church, and whether He is filling everything in their lives.

And again I say to you that the great tragedy is that too many believers join the church looking for the wrong things, and too many believers come to church seeking the wrong things. It's always about what it can give them, what it offers them, what it can do for them, and what it can do for their children. I spoke to another pastor this week who said to me that for five years, people came to church and small groups week after week, and their dominant focus was on what the church was doing to meet their needs.

It's a parasitic view of church, and a therapeutic faith, which is why the moment things don't go our way, the moment our ego is bruised, the moment our needs are not met, the moment things no longer suit our lifestyle, and the moment things require commitment, we bail or look for another community we can feed off. (*I am here to feed off you, not thrive with you or grow with you*) What an offense to Jesus and to those you church with. You know who they come to worship, and you know who they really love. Imagine saying that to your wife or husband. (*I don't come to make Jesus my treasure, and neither do I come to make Him the treasure of others; I come to be treasured*) **Oh what an idolatrous view of church that we must repent of.** Oh what an idolatrous view of church that steals God's glory, that exchanges His worth for our own worth.

God has saved you, redeemed you, forgiven you, and adopted you into this community, for the purpose of gifting you to serve others, so that together with others, Jesus might be our shared treasure, to His praise and our joy. Our criteria for choosing a church should be a church where Jesus and His redeeming work is treasured, where people are here to make that a shared reality in our life, and where we have an opportunity to bring about that reality by using our gift to that end. **We have been saved to thrive and grow with others, to make Jesus and His redeeming love our supreme treasure.** You want to build a supremely happy church that most praises Jesus, and brings you and others supreme joy. **The key is to make Jesus your treasure and the treasure of others, by serving to make that a reality in our lives here at GracePoint.**

Understand Your Part in God's Community

And so understand your unique place, your part in bringing us to maturity in Jesus at GracePoint; understand your God-given part in making Jesus our shared treasure at GracePoint.

The use of your gifts, in making Jesus our shared treasure, is also the means by which God safeguards the affections of our hearts from other alternatives. It is also the means by which God establishes and protects His family from falling prey to idolatry, it is also the means by which God prepares His people to deal with temptation, because week after, on Sundays, in community groups, over lunch or dinner, whenever we meet with others in this family, in every interaction, and in everything we do, our serving with others, whatever that might be, is pushing us, encouraging us, strengthening us, and drawing us to focus our heart and mind on Jesus!

Your gifts, if they are used rightly, should protect, prepare, and safeguard the lives of others here against that sort of immaturity, and against that sort of drifting as believers. In the majority of churches in our city only five percent of regulars are actively serving; it's no wonder that our churches are riddled with immaturity, with people who warm the seats on Sunday but whose hearts are far from Jesus, with people who remain fixated on their own lives and not on Jesus, and with people who take their cue in life from everything out there rather than from Jesus.

Let me say to you, the key to a supremely happy church that most leads to Jesus being praised and us experiencing joy is one where we are **all** using our gifts to make Jesus our shared treasure, where we are **all** doing our part in helping others grow in a knowledge of Jesus, and where we are **all** working to serve to fill and saturate each others' lives with Jesus. **Jesus has given you gifts for that purpose so that together we can serve each other, and help each other grow towards Jesus, our shared treasure.** God has given you a gift to

bring about maturity in the life of others here at GracePoint, and God has given them a gift to bring about maturity in your life at GracePoint.

So what follows in vv.15-16 is the call for us to grow towards maturity in Jesus. Instead of immaturity, Paul says in vv.15-16 that we should want to grow into the fullness of Jesus. The HCSB translation says - *Rather speaking the truth in love, let us grow towards Jesus.*

¹⁵*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.* Notice again the trajectory of maturity and growth in the Christian life; the direction is towards Jesus. In every way we are growing into Him, into Jesus! And notice how he says that it is something we are to do as a church; let **us** grow, and **we** are to grow up to be filled with Jesus alone - *not towards anything else – not to an unstable life swayed by alternatives to Jesus, substitute treasures to Jesus, rival idolatries to Jesus.* **The object of our growth, and the goal of our growth, should be towards Jesus, into Him who leads us, and knowing Christ more and more with each passing day.**

Maturity comes about not just as we are dependent on Jesus who holds us together and supplies our needs, but as v.16, *‘each part does its work’ – when each part is working properly – by the proper working of each individual part.* **Growth into maturity depends on each part, and on each individual part serving with the gift Jesus has given them.** The measure of how much Jesus is going to be our shared treasure depends on each individual part working properly.

Pause for a moment and listen carefully to what Paul is saying. My passion for Jesus, my love for Jesus, my growing to know Jesus more and more, and my being brought to fullness in Jesus **depends on you.** It depends on you playing your specific part and using your gift to bring this about in my life. Your passion for Jesus, your love for Jesus, your growing to know Jesus more and more, and your being brought to fullness in Jesus, depends **on others here, and on others here playing their part and using their gifts to bring this about in your life.**

Now some of you don't see the dots. You don't see the connections and how this works. You look around you and say "I don't know you, or you, or you; why would my growth depend on people I don't know?" But you have to look at what binds you and connects you to others .You belong to the body of Christ. It is Jesus who connects you. We belong to His body, and we are the parts of His body, and like a body we can't function without each other, and we can't grow without each other. 1 Corinthians 12 says we are interdependent, and growth only takes place as each part does his or her work. Growth takes place as each part does its work of ministry and service. The body grows as each part does its work no matter how small or large, seen or unseen, visible or invisible.

Imagine a symphony with missing notes in the Opera House. It still sounds beautiful in some parts but it's not complete; the more missing notes, the more it draws attention away from the music, and the less we enjoy it. God's got a symphony called the church and you are the notes. The purpose of God's grand symphony is to make music that stirs our hearts and affections for Jesus to His praise and your joy. **When all the notes are played, it moves us towards Jesus.** You hear the music and your heart is drawn to Jesus. So when notes are missing, it's not complete, and the more missing notes, the less Jesus is magnified, and the less we enjoy Him.

Imagine a painting on a canvas with strokes and colours missing. It still looks beautiful in some parts but it's not complete; the more missing strokes and colour, the more it draws

attention away from the painting, and the less we enjoy it. God's got a masterpiece called the church and you are the strokes and colour. The purpose of God's grand painting is to have every stroke and colour produce a painting that stirs our hearts and affections for Jesus to His praise and our joy. **When all the strokes and colours are down on the canvas, it moves us towards Jesus.** You look at the painting and your heart is drawn to Jesus! So when strokes and colours are missing, it's not complete, and the more missing strokes and colour, the less Jesus is magnified, and the less we enjoy Him.

The measure of how much Jesus is going to be our shared treasure, and the measure of our growth and maturity, depends on each of you doing your part in using your gift to serve others here at GracePoint. You are the notes that will complete the symphony and draw us to Jesus more and more; you are the brush strokes and colour that will complete the painting and draw us to Jesus more and more.

Application

- 1) Growth is the normal expectation in every area of life; something is wrong where no growth is present. The same holds true in the Christian life. We must not be satisfied with being stagnant; it is an indicator that something is wrong. **You gotta fight for growth, you have to fight for maturity, and you have to resolve to work on growing.** It's also the reason why so many believers have no joy. They did when they first came to know Jesus, but the reason why they no longer have joy is because they haven't grown in Jesus.

It is like a guy meeting a girl for the first time. He's all excited when going out with her, but he never spends time with her. Months after, all he knows of her is their first meeting, and years after that, she is but a distant memory. **Joy in the Christian life is proportional to growth in the Christian life.** The more you are growing in Jesus, the more you will find joy in Him. It is just like every area of life; the more I am growing in understanding, knowledge, appreciation, and discovery of the one who is the object of my affections, the more I will begin to enjoy and delight in them. The more I invest in the one who is the object of my interest, the more I will enjoy and delight in them. A mother grows in her love for her baby as she spends time growing to know her child, as she discovers more of his personality as he grows, as she invest in him. A gamer experiences excitement when he buys a new game, but not as much as when he plays it, not as much as he unpacks and unravels the game, not as much as he immerses himself in the game. The same holds true in the Christian life. The more I invest in Jesus, the more I will begin to enjoy and delight in him because I am growing in him. **Joy in the Christian life is proportional to growth in the Christian life.**

- 2) You have been given at least one gift that needs to be unpacked for service here at GracePoint that, when used, will be a note or brush stroke of colour that will move the affections of our hearts and minds towards Jesus, to His praise and our joy. **That is God's gift to you for His people; you have a gift that's going to help us make Jesus our shared treasure to His praise and our joy.** Your responsibility is to be equipped to serve and then serve. So if you're here at GracePoint don't be a bystander; take up your place in this family. You and I are dependent on each other for our growth and maturity as a church. The measure of our love, knowledge, and being satisfied in Jesus, is dependent on each one of us doing our part in this family.
 - a. Pray and ask God to help you work out your gift – *you wired me up, you brought me into this community, you made me, so reveal to me how I can serve to help others know and love and treasure Jesus.*

- b. Meditate on what the Bible says about serving and gifts – 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. They're not exhaustive but they give you a sense of the many gifts available, and will help you work out what Jesus has given you.
- c. Ask your community group leader and others here to pray for you, and ask them to help you work out how you might be gifted to serve. People who are close to you often know what you are good at, and what you are passionate about.
- d. Look for opportunities to serve others and help others make Jesus their treasure at GracePoint. E.g. in community group, at church, or in ministries around. Ministry doesn't have to be formal; everyone is called to ministry here at GracePoint. You don't have to wait to be invited to serve. Go up and offer yourself. Look for needs that need to be met. You will discover your gifts as you serve.