

## “God’s Vision for the Church” (Eph. 4:13-16)

This section talks about what future picture God has for His Church. It’s the maturity as one body. It shows how far believers of Jesus Christ can grow.

### 1. To have the unity in the faith and in the knowledge

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<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The first picture is the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. What is that?

In the previous section, Paul already said, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (v.5). That is the status of believers in the Lord. Based on this, he develops his point, how each of us will grow. And it makes perfect sense when it reaches the previous verse, “so that the body of Christ may be built up” (v.12).

We were called out of the world and gathered and joined together in the Lord. “The whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21). There is a body of Christ, church there.

And that is not the end, but it will grow. It will grow to “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” That’s the vision God has for church.

Let’s think about our physical growth. A new born baby has a big head. His hands and feet are weak. He cannot even hold his head up. He cannot see well. But he is a perfect human. And it doesn’t mean that is the end. He will grow. And we will not grow like an enlarged copy, will not become bigger evenly in every way. There will be different stages in our growth. There is a time when our hands and feet grow strong. There is a time when we grow tall. There is a time when we grow in weight. There are many different stages of growth.

It is the same for our spiritual journey. When a person is born again, it’s the beginning. It will not stop growing and remain in immaturity, but it will grow into “maturity.” It will not stop at the state of “half-finished,” but it will grow to “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

At the beginning, our faith and knowledge are not balanced. They are not connected well. They are not integrated yet. But as we experience different things,

and as we study the Word of God, gradually our faith in Jesus and our knowledge of Him will be connected, integrated, and balanced. The growth takes time. It takes time for our faith and knowledge to be integrated.

Let's look at Jesus' disciples. One time, they were on the boat with Jesus. They only had one loaf of bread. Jesus told them, "Be careful with the yeast of Pharisees." When the disciples heard it, they started to blame one another for having no bread.

### Mark 8:17-21

<sup>17</sup> Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?

<sup>18</sup> Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. <sup>20</sup> "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." <sup>21</sup> He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

The incident of Jesus' feeding 4000 people with seven loaves of bread is in Mark chapter 8, right before this section. Mark describes clearly how the knowledge of disciples and their faith in Jesus are not integrated. Their knowledge about Jesus and faith in him are not connected well.

They had just experienced that Jesus could feed 4000 people with just seven loaves of bread. They knew what Jesus could do. They saw it. However, now they think Jesus is blaming them because they only have one loaf of bread. Why couldn't they think, "It's all right to have just one loaf of bread, for Jesus is with us." What they knew and their faith are not connected. They could not exercise their faith with their knowledge.

We are also like these disciples sometimes. We know very well that Jesus loves us. He loves us so much that he even died on the cross for us. However, when something inconvenient happens, we may think "God left me alone." When our prayers are not answered, we might think, "God doesn't really care for me." When things don't go as we wished, we might blame one another. Is that only me?

To have the unity in the faith and in the knowledge.

First, we need to know Jesus personally. We can't trust in someone whom we don't know. It is important for us to read the Word daily and get familiar with His Word. We read the Bible, listen to sermons and read books about Him. We have knowledge about who Jesus is.

And we will listen to him and apply it to our lives. We act on it, live out of the Word. When we practice our faith, it will grow. Make every effort to add to our faith. As we experience God's faithfulness and greatness, our knowledge of him will grow. And when our knowledge and faith are connected, we will experience him more. The more faith and knowledge are integrated, the more we become mature, and Christlike.

And it leads us to have the unity among us naturally. Because we know the same God, and believe the same God. If all we become like Christ, the unity is its natural result. But while we are immature, our unity is also immature.

## 2. To become mature

### 13

<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

It says, "become mature." It suggests that now we are still immature, on the process of growth. We grow physically into a chronological adult. But the growing into an emotional adult is another thing. And we cannot be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.

Children see the world as if they were the center of it. They are not aware of how the society is structured, nor are they aware that they are the members of the society. Of course they never think about their roles and responsibility in the society.

When we grow and become mature, we understand we have roles and responsibilities. We can't just rely on someone else. We will recognize our potential and do something as a part of family and society. And we will work together, help each other, and build something big which you can't do it alone.

Children are short-sighted. They have no idea what they are doing now can lead them where. And they are not patient. It is very difficult for them to wait quietly. Children are motivated by what they are interested in. And they are emotionally affected, their interest will change frequently.

We will grow and become mature. We will understand there are consequences of our actions. We will become more patient, more self-controlled, not just say “No” to bad things, but also say “Yes” to good things. We grow, become strong, bearing hardships and challenges, and will fulfill our mission, our purpose of life.

And children are influenced easily, but adults are not.

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<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

We must keep learning the Word. But knowing about Jesus and increasing our knowledge of the Bible are not the end. That is only one aspect of our growth. Our knowledge and faith must be integrated.

An important key of integrating knowledge and faith is experience. When we experience who God is, how he loves us and how he really cares for us, our trust in him will grow. The more you know him in reality, the more you will trust him.

God is not a thing nor merely a concept. He is a person. He is not the object of our study. It is impossible to know him truly if we don't have the relationship with him. We grow in the relationship with God. We practice our faith in the relationship with others. We act on faith, live by faith in the relationship with others, as we live in the world. By acting on faith, we will experience Jesus even more and our knowledge will increase even more.

We will grow not only in the knowledge, but also emotionally. Our emotional growth takes a big role in our spirituality.

- Emotional Infants look for others to take care of them. They use others

as objects to meet their needs.

- Emotional Children are content and happy as long as they receive what they want. They interpret disagreements as personal offenses. And they complain, withdraw, manipulate, take revenge, become sarcastic when they don't get their way.
- Emotional Adolescents tend to often be defensive. They become preoccupied with themselves and are critical and judgmental.
- Emotional Adults recognize, manage, and take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings. They respect others without having change them and appreciate people for who they are.<sup>1</sup>

We can only exercise our faith as who we are. For example, emotional infants will pray for meeting their needs naturally. They can understand God takes care of them. In their mind, they are the ones who must be served. But it's not easy for them to see themselves as servants. For example, emotional Children will go forward by faith as long as things go as they wished. They are happy to serve as long as others agree with them. But it's very difficult for them to cooperate with those who have different ideas.

Emotional growth doesn't happen overnight. Emotional Infants can't suddenly become an Emotional Adults. It's the same as our physical growth. It takes time. We grow step by step, day by day, year by year.

Each stage shows we have certain behavior. It suggests there are certain things we must learn in each stage particularly. We practice them, exercise them and experience them, then we can move on to the next stage.

For example, teenagers are in the season of shifting from children to adults. They are developing their way of living with their thoughts. They like to have their own thoughts and want to do as they think. They will go through "try, error and fix" many times. It's a necessary process to become Emotional Adults who can manage and take responsibility for their own thoughts.

If their parents are Emotional Adults, they can receive healthy support, because Emotional Adults respect others without trying to change them and appreciate people for who they are.

But if their parents are not mature emotionally, they will fight with their

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Zondervan, 2006, pp.178-179

kids. The parents try to defend their ideas and control kids according to their ideas. If kids don't follow their ideas, they will tell them how much they are disappointed, how sad they are. They manipulate their teenager kids to believe "the parents' plan is their plan." I know this very well because that's what my parents did to me. What is its cost? Kids miss the opportunity to grow. Or they grow unhealthy way.

There is no one who is perfect, except Jesus. All of us are still immature, on the process of growing. Good news is: God gave us a new family, that is a church. We cannot grow emotionally healthy if we are alone. We need each other. We help each other for emotional growth. We can grow together.

Here are my quick practical suggestions. At least it works for me.

No.1: We must be aware of our emotion or feeling. Don't ignore your feeling. Don't put it away. Emotion is a window of your mind. Feeling tells you what is happening in you. You must look inside of you, understand what is happening in you, accept it as a part of you, and take care of you gently, kindly and gracefully. Love yourself because God loves you.

No.2: If you were hurt emotionally, you need emotional healings. For example, when you experienced a shocking incident, you are damaged emotionally. You put a shield there. It's the emotional defense system God gave us. It's very important especially for children, because they cannot fight back. The shield protects you from further damage.

But that emotional part cannot grow because it's not only injured but also covered.<sup>2</sup> When you become emotionally strong, you need to take off the shield, look at the wound, and bring it to the Lord and receive healing. It's quite painful process actually. And it's often a long way. So it's good to take the process with someone who is a mature believer and whom you can trust.

For healthy emotional growth, we need love. We need the experience of being loved. And we also need to exercise to love others. We cannot grow emotionally healthy if we are alone. We need each other. We help each other for emotional growth. God gave us a new family, church where we can grow together.

### 3. To attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.141

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<sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

We will grow together as one body. What we are attaining to is “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” The body of Christ, church will grow. Each one of us is its part, so we will grow, too. We all reflect the Lord’s glory, and are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory (2 Cor. 3:16).

One Christian cannot express all greatness of Jesus. But through the church which Christians are joined and held together, and built up into, the greatness of Jesus is expressed multilaterally, comprehensively, organically and actively.

“Every supporting ligament” will join one another. “Each part does its work” according to its ability, and they all do different roles and cooperate for one mission. They will be joined and held together and their “unity” is strengthened. It is the heart of love that needs one another and that serve one another.

For closing I like to introduce what Darrell Johnson says in his book "Experiencing the Trinity."

"The living God is not a solitary God. The living God is not an isolated God. The living God is a relationship, a community, a Trinity. And this God draws near to us to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing and loving of himself."

" 'The closer you get to the heart of God, the closer you get to what is on God's heart.' And God's heart is the world – your neighbors and my neighbors; empty, rebellious, broken people for whom the Son died. People over whom the Spirit broods. How can we help but love them when we know and feel the love of the Trinity for them? Not just loving them with our love, temporarily, up and down. But seeing God loving them and joining God loving them. We are called to be co-lovers with God of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Church is built in love, in the love of God for church, in the love of church

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<sup>3</sup> Darrell Johnson, "Experiencing the Trinity," Regent College Publishing, 2002, pp.67-69

that loves God, in the loving fellowship of people who love God. And when the world sees that, they can truly recognize that God is surely there, and they will come to know that it is true and real that God loves the world. His name will be glorified and worshiped by all nations.

Today we studied "God's Vision for the Church." Church is not a building, not an organization, not a Sunday program. Church is the local assembly of Jesus' lovers. It's us. So, we are His vision! And His vision is ours. Amen!!

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection

1. How do you describe "God's Vision for the Church" by your own word? How do you feel while you are picturing that vision in your mind?
2. What is your challenge to integrate faith and knowledge? What help do you need? Where will you receive the help?
3. You may observe your emotion in this week. At the end of each day you may look back your day. Can you recognize a time when you were like an Emotional Infant, Emotional Child and/or an Emotional Adolescent? Can you notice any pattern? Can you think of the reason why you felt that way? What will you do to grow that part? What help do you need? Where will you receive the help?