

Made to Mature

- A man was having coffee after a church service. The people around him were discussing the sermon on miracles and someone asked him, "Do you believe that Jesus turned water into wine?"
 - "I'm only a beginner," the man replied, "I can't speak about water into wine yet, but in the few weeks I've known Christ, he's managed to turn beer into furniture and betting slips into groceries."
- As we work through Ephesians, we are - I hope! - seeing something of Paul's wonderful summary of the Christian faith: a radical disease (sin) that needs a radical remedy (God's grace extended through Christ's death & resurrection), and which results in a radical response (discipleship)
- When we used those headings in looking at Ephesians 2:1-10, we only really touched on that last point:
 - Paul implied that a decision to follow the Lord, to accept his grace, to respond in faith, would turn our lives upside down;
 - but neither did he in that passage, nor have we as we have further explored Ephesians explored that more fully
- As in the story of the man for whom Jesus had changed beer into furniture and betting slips into groceries, Christian faith should and will make a radical difference to our lives
 - for we were made to mature
- God didn't spend the blood of his own Son to have us as ornaments, sitting around, looking pretty, and doing nothing
- He paid a price beyond comprehension so that we could be his tools, used daily in his service, working hard in his hands to build his Kingdom
 - "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (v.1)
 - "he who gave some to be ... to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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." (v.12-13)
- He made us to mature
 - 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. (v.14)
 - if we aren't growing & moving on in faith, then we are slipping back & dying
 - (we'll look at what it means to mature in a while; point here is that we are made to mature)
- That is Paul's first emphasis:
 - I suppose more an underlying assumption about the ways things are and should be
 - should make us ask ourselves: am I growing?
 - a question I asked when Freya was admitted to membership last week - are we keeping those promises that tend to help us grow, not just externally, but in a way that tends towards growth in love for God, faith, trust, vision....
- But Paul also had a particular area in mind where that should be true:
 - "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (v.3)
 - "...the whole body, joined and held together..." (v.16)

Modelled on the Master

- We should take note of something fairly obvious here: Paul's concern for unity here is not based on any pragmatic considerations:
 - he's not saying "a divided church won't work; it won't get as much done.... so let's remain united"

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- he's not saying "a divided church won't be able to witness so effectively.... so let's remain united"
- Instead, his concern is that we be **modelled on our master, like Jesus**
 - this is the general and underlying reason why growth is the order of the day for Christians
 - we are to become increasingly like Jesus, a constant process of change, transformation and growth
- That it is true in the area of unity as much as anywhere else is highlighted here:
 - for as Paul says (v.4-6): *"There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*
 - Jesus is one with his Father, heading in the same direction; the Spirit too is pulling in the same direction. The whole of God's intervening work in the world is with the same purpose in mind - and he works at unity with himself, consistently
- In other words, we are to be like God and God is united in his work:
 - so work at unity!
- Unity, then, is one example where we are to become increasingly mature, increasingly like our master, modelled on him
 - and as such it has to do with **character** much more than **knowledge**
 - did you notice v.14 when we read it earlier?
 - no longer infants, able to be steady in face of false teaching...
 - we will resist false knowledge, wrong understandings by the character of Christ growing in us - humility, patience, gentleness, forbearance, love...

Menu for Maturity

- Scattered throughout this passage, Paul presents us with a practical **menu for maturity**:
 - little things that we can work at that will very practically make a difference in our growth towards maturity and unity
 - partly answering the "How?" question...
 - **how can we become more mature?**
 - **how can unity grow amongst us?**

Humility

- v.2 - **"Be completely humble"**
 - not drawing attention to self, not doing things to look good;
 - a characteristic valued by an older generation raised on the ethic of service;
 - a preparedness to try new things - my way may not be right...
- As with all the items on this menu, it needs to be served up in action and not mere intention:
 - how I choose to act in humility ways, not just how I think about myself

Gentleness

- v.2 - **"Be completely... gentle"**
 - manner in which you do things - could run an organisation or activity successfully, but careless of the pressures you put on fellow leaders or hurt feelings as you impose your way....
 - leads to unity, not merely outwards success

Patience

- v.2 - **"Be completely... patient"**
 - similar to above - focus is on relationships with our fellow believers;
 - patient with foibles and failings; focus on our common priority - Christ!

Tolerance

- v.2 - **"bearing with one another."**
 - very similar to patience with others foibles;

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- Christians can sometimes disagree on lesser matters - interpretation of Revelation, baptism, manifestations of the Holy Spirit, worship styles - need for tolerance

Speaking Truth in Love

- v. 15 - *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."*
 - important addition to the point about tolerance - it is not a tolerance without limit;
 - for Jesus said "I am THE way, THE truth, THE life - no one comes to the Father except through me"
 - tolerant of less important areas, where Scripture can be interpreted in different ways with integrity and a desire to submit to its God-given authority
- But truth needs spoken, otherwise we end up mixed up and not following God!
 - in love (humble, gentle, patient, tolerant...); not excuse to slag off!

Use Your Gift

- v. 11, 12 - *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"*
 - if we don't all pull together we'll end up with a lop-sided church, gaps where your service is required
 - use your gifts - God has given us them and a place to use them
- Imagine a house with half the bricks missing!

Conclusion

- Sum all of that up:
 - we are made to mature - growth, change, perhaps uncomfortable, but what we are made for
 - that growth is to make us more like our Master
 - and what is our Master like? - humble, gentle, patient, tolerant, loving, yet truthful, and using your gift

A final observation

- *we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ* (v. 15)
- our maturity isn't to do with what we do, but **who we know**
- as such, it will grow as we spend time with him, dwell with him, allow his fullness to grow within us, seek not just to **"be humble"**, but let **his humility** grow in us, not just to **"be patient"**, but increasingly be characterised by **his patience**