

Every Pastor's Dream

Romans 15:14 & Eph. 4:11-16

Message by Dr R Bruce Montgomery ~ Grace Church ~ 8/27/17

As Paul is writing this letter to the Christians in Rome, he is making plans to visit their church.

It is something he's been hoping to do for many years. He is looking forward to going there, and wants them to be just as excited about his visit as he was.

He wants them to understand why he is coming to them. Putting himself in their shoes, he realizes they might feel a bit apprehensive about him coming.

The rumor might spread that he was coming to scold them; to "straighten them out" and possibly discipline them.

You know the feeling if you've ever been called to the principal's office, as I was numerous times in Junior High and High School. My first thought was always, "*oh no! I'm in trouble!*" Wasn't always – one time was to ask if I would tutor a new little first grader who was struggling with math and reading, and another time to ask for me to draw up sketches for an outer office/reception area. What a sense of relief!

Anyway, as Paul begins this personal part of his letter by assuring them they're not in trouble. Far from it.

He writes: **Romans 15:14** *I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.*

Even though Paul had not yet personally been to Rome, the reports he was receiving from others who had been there were good reports!

I am frequently asked to give a character references for someone – seeking a job, applying for a scholarship to college, volunteering with a non-profit organization, seeking legal status or citizenship.

Usually pleased to do so, although have had in the past year to turn down one request from someone I'd barely met and knew nothing about who was hoping to get a reduced sentence from a judge! That one I had to politely decline.

Over the years as I have reviewed references for potential candidates for staff positions, I am trying to determine

1. Their **moral character**. Are they trustworthy? Are they passionate for God and his church? Do they truly love others?

2. Their **knowledge and training**. Look at the education they have had – both formal and informal. How well do they know the Bible? Have they studied and do they have a good grasp of the skills necessary to do the job we are considering them for?

3. Their **ability to do the job**. Does their experience dovetail with the duties and responsibilities of the position? How well do they relate to other people?

The Romans have passed the "**background checks**" with flying colors in each area. The church in Rome had been given a good character reference. Paul has evaluated them in the areas of **heart, mind and ability**. Paul is convinced of three things:

1. Regarding their **moral character**, they are **full of goodness**. Refers to their kindness and generosity, their honesty in dealing with others. Not just talking about being "nice." Goodness is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). A person can't be "**full of godly goodness**" apart from being full of the Holy Spirit.
2. Regarding their **knowledge and training**, they are **complete in knowledge**. Means they have a comprehensive understanding of God and insight into the gospel of salvation.
3. Regarding their **ability to do the job**, they are **competent to instruct one another**.

Competent (able) comes from Greek *dunamis*, power. I.e. they are empowered – again underlining the role of the Holy Spirit, who is the one who empowers believers for ministry and service.

The word **instruct** includes the idea of **admonishment**, correcting something that is wrong.

We're so afraid of offending someone. But if we really care for our fellow believers, shouldn't we point in the right direction if we see them taking a wrong turn?

Not talking about tearing other people down, or airing their dirty laundry, but about recognizing them as having great worth in God's eyes and lovingly encouraging them to stay on the right path and helping them get back on it when they stray from it.

The Romans had never had an apostle in their midst. Many had been followers of Jesus when they arrived. They had come from various parts of the world, were truly a multi-cultural and multi-lingual church. Each had a different testimony of how they came to the Lord, and who had taught them and mentored them in the Christian faith.

Yet they had preserved the teachings they had received and were committed to Jesus Christ and to sharing the gospel. Paul is confident that they are now mature enough to instruct, exhort, warn and correct one another as situations arose.

Paul couldn't directly take any credit for their character, their knowledge, their ability, since he hadn't been there, and this was his first letter to them.

However he did have some indirect influence as some of those in the congregation were people he had led to the Lord or taught (will get acquainted with some of them by name in chapter 16).

At any rate, he was proud of them. They were a fine congregation indeed – any pastor's dream. You may think that pastors only dream of such things as having more people and more money and bigger buildings, of having what the business world calls a "bigger market share" than the competition, of name recognition, of maybe being on TV and becoming "famous."

I can't speak for all pastors everywhere, but I can tell you what the pastors of Grace Church dream about, and that is seeing the members of our congregation full of goodness and knowledge and able to instruct one another.

More than just a dream – it is the driving goal that we have devoted our lives to seeing accomplished.

Second passage I would like to look at with you this morning is **Ephesians 4:11-16**

After listing in **verse 11** categories of gifted leaders that Jesus gives to his church: apostles, prophets, evangelists and

pastor-teachers, Paul gives the ultimate object of the leadership and the church in **verses 12-16**. I will be returning to this passage and going into more detail in November ("Getting Involved" month).

Ephesians 4:12,13 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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 is essential that we have the right purposes, goals and objectives.

Normally church growth resources concentrate on what will bring about numerical or financial growth. Paul doesn't even address that, but instead focuses on the goals of growth in unity and maturity.

a. Goal 1 – unity. How will we know when we've gotten there? Two markers:

[HIGHLIGHTED] Vs. 13 until we all reach unity (1) in the faith and (2) in the knowledge of the Son of God . . .

The object of both prepositional phrases is "*the Son of God.*" So first *faith in the Son of God.* And dovetailed with that is *knowledge of the Son of God.* How much do we trust him, and how well do we know him?

This twofold unity – of the head and of the heart – trusting Jesus and knowing him fully - is what we're aiming for.

b. Goal 2 – maturity

Ephesians 4:13b-14 and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁴ 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.

Maturity means fully developed, fully grown.

Children are lots of fun. Can't believe the joy it is to be a grandparent. But besides being fun, there are certain characteristics of young children: they are naïve and gullible. It's easy to fool them, and to play tricks on them. And besides that, they need to have their diapers changed regularly.

I remember talking to Eddie, my second-oldest grandchild, right before he turned four years old. He sang to me, and told me several “knock-knock” jokes. He reminded me that “A is for Apple.” “B” is for ball. And the blend “tr” is for tree. And then “signed off” with “bye. Talk to you later.”

Last week my daughter posted photos of him with his backpack in front of his new school, where he’s entering Middle School as a sixth grader.

He’s growing up, and I watch each stage of his development with interest and pride. I adored him as a baby. Babies are fun, but wouldn’t want him to stay a baby forever. Children are designed to grow older, and taller, and smarter (hopefully), passing into adolescence and then adulthood.

In a similar way, recently converted Christians are fun to be around – they’re excited, eager to learn, nothing hum-drum. But they are also fickle, gullible, easily influenced by the latest book or fad or popular TV show, and often make messes that require others to clean up after them.

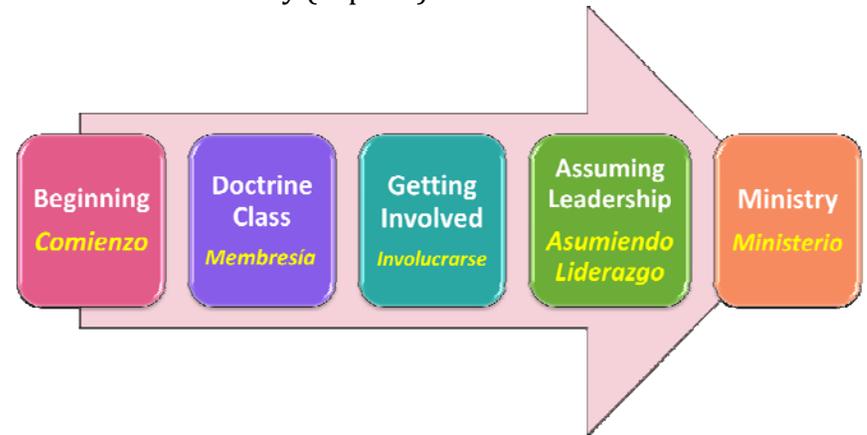
Like children, they aren’t meant to stay infants forever.

Let me back up and point out the obvious: We all enter this world by being born. This life is not a continuation of another life, or an addendum to a previous life, it is a new life.

When we are “born again” we are born into an entirely new realm which is in complete contrast to the old realm. The New Testament constantly emphasizes this vital principle. **“You must be born again!”** Jesus told Nicodemus.

We start as infants, but aren’t meant to remain such. “The perpetual infancy of the believer” is not a biblical doctrine! From the moment a person is born again he or she needs to grow and develop and mature.

At Grace Church we are developing a **Pathway to Service** and Ministry (explain).



There is a curious and dangerous tendency in churches to forget this foundational truth of process and growth. We emphasize the starting point - being born again-but then tend to assume that once we have become a Christian we have arrived, that it is the end of the story. Our job from then on is to get involved in activities.

We by-pass to our detriment the process which the Bible emphasizes over and over. It produces a state of confusion.

In the pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, Paul writes about novices, and about what novices should not do, and what they should not be asked to do.

Too often this is totally ignored in churches.

Instead of teaching that we start as novices and need to grow and learn and to become fit and qualified to do service for the Lord, our slogan is “*give the convert something to do!*”

It is not scriptural to place people in positions of leadership immediately. Whether they have positions of influence and skill in the community is not the determining factor.

In church life, natural ability and status or influence isn’t the first test of service. What is required is moral character and spiritual apprehension. Just like children, new Christians need to learn self-control, acquire stability. These qualities must be developed over time.

Children are easily misled and deceived. Easy to impose on them and take advantage of them. They don't have the reserves of knowledge and experience to draw on. . This is no criticism, it is a description. Because it's a child it can't help it.

Falls prey to any imposter that comes along. "*Come taste!*" the ice cream vendor cries out, and children flock around eager to satisfy their desires.

It could be good for them, or it could be poison, could be habit forming – children don't have the knowledge or experience to discern.

People want to propel themselves or others into positions of leadership far before they are ready.

E.g. sending soldiers into battle before have completed their training (such as in Korean war sending Marines to frontlines who hadn't even completed basic training).

Baby Christians aren't equipped to discern difference between right and wrong, and so fall prey to con-men and spiritual counterfeits: ***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***

Jesus warned **Matthew 7:15** "***Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.***" The immature Christian can't tell the difference between a sheep and a pretend sheep, and gets devoured.

Ephesians 4:15 ***Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.***

A couple more important observations from our texts today. Knowing the truth is fundamental in our quest for unity and maturity. "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,*" said Jesus.

All four of the leadership gifts mentioned in **Ephesians 4** are characterized by teaching the truth.

The apostles and prophets provided the initial and normative teaching preserved in the New Testament.

Evangelists proclaim the central core of the teaching – redemption through Jesus Christ.

Pastor-teachers instruct the flock week in and week out through systematic exposition of scriptural truth.

Knowing the truth is vitally important. But truth is not mentioned in isolation. It's not enough to just bombard people with facts. **Vs. 15** - we need to "***speak the truth in love.***" A literal translation is "*truthing in love.*"

This verse has often been twisted and misapplied as a justification for tolerating anything and everything. We are told that as long as a person is nice and loving then what he or she believes is comparatively unimportant.

The apostle Paul doesn't tell us to cultivate a vague, loving spirit, but to hold to and speak ***the truth*** in love. That doesn't mean we should smile on all views and never criticize and reject any views at all.

We must have a standard of truth if we are to avoid being ***Verse 14 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.***

In society we have standards in weights and measurements. Business could not be conducted without them. We have a gold standard, a standard yard (or standard meter). They are necessary, because without them we would never know if we are being treated fairly or being robbed.

It is precisely the same in the realm of truth. You can't keep from being carried about by every wind of doctrine unless you have a standard by which to judge them.

Did you ever try to nail jello to the wall? Or grab the fog, or a sunbeam, or the breeze?

Just as you can't hold on to anything that is amorphous in the material world, you can't grasp something that is nebulous and vague in the spiritual world.

You can't hold on to the truth unless you know what the truth is. There are certain doctrines which are absolutely essential to the Christian faith: things like the authority of the Bible, the person and work of Jesus Christ, justification by faith. We hold to a Statement of Faith in common with other Evangelical Free Churches (copies available in library or office).

We periodically have “doctrine” classes (part of our Pathway) to look up the Scriptures and absorb these truths.

We must have truth, but we also must be careful of how that truth is applied. If we remove love from truth, we may end up with orthodoxy, but it is a hollow and bitter orthodoxy. When truth is proclaimed in an unpleasant, harsh manner, it fails to win anybody. The truth needs not only to be spoken but to be lived out in a loving manner.

We must never start by denouncing, but by humbly explaining and expounding.

To truly love a person is to desire the very best for that person. Love is not sentimental and weak. It is strong, it is true, it is pure.

We must hold on to the truth at all costs, but we must hold it in love in order to enlighten and persuade people and to win them to Jesus!

True love is, among other things, ***patient, and kind. It doesn't boast, isn't proud, isn't rude. It always protects, always trusts always hopes, always perseveres.***¹

What are we being built up into, in our quest for unity and maturity? ***Vs. 13b the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

Vs. 15 we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ.

The goal of building the church is that the church will grow up to be like Jesus. “*That's a pretty lofty goal,*” you say. “*Is it even possible?*” It wouldn't have been set before us if it wasn't attainable.

Children often fail to realize their potential because the bar is set too low by their family and by their schools.

In the church, we often fail to realize our potential, to be all that God has called us to be, because we settle for less than the ultimate. The standard we are aiming is none other being a fitting body for our glorified Savior, the head of the church.

In closing I want to point out the little word “*all*” in ***vs. 13. until we all reach unity. . . and become mature.*** No one gets left behind. No one gets discarded.

A big emphasis in our little city is on health and wellness. People from around the world visit and move here to take advantage of the “healing waters” of our spas, our smog-free climate.

My dream is that Grace Church be known as a “health and wellness” church – full of goodness, knowledge, and the maturity to encourage and build up – and even correct when necessary – one another to the glory of God, who is worthy of all honor and praise.

¹ I Corinthians 13:4-7