

Formed for the Voyage to Maturity
Ephesians 4:11-16

The church is the one sure God-designed vessel to carry believers to a mature faith formed in the image of Christ. Paul insisted that despite its imperfections, the church was God's means of accomplishing His plan and purpose for believers' lives.

To offset the temptation to abandon the church or minimize its importance, we must recognize and respect the leadership of the church whom Christ Himself purposefully and intentionally selected to grow and equip believers. If Christians choose not to faithfully place themselves under the ministry and guidance of their local church and its pastor-teacher, they willfully step outside of Jesus' plan for their own maturity in faith.

Next, the text affirms that within and only within this structured community of believers will the two essential components of Christian maturity will be achieved: (1) unity or oneness in regard to the faith and (2) the knowledge of the Son of God. When the Bible uses the expression, "the faith," it is referring to the objective content of Christian truth. The church is the sphere in which accurate communication of "the faith" happens. The word "knowledge" isn't simply knowing information but personal, experiential knowledge. Again, it is in the church gathered that we experience the personal presence of Christ like no place else.

Head knowledge of the truth without experiential knowledge of Jesus produces a dry, stale, pharisaical religion. Experiencing the presence of Jesus without the knowledge of the truth produces an unanchored emotionalism and misguided zeal. Active, faithful participation in the church is the one antidote to both extremes. It is the one way both to unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the Son of God.

How can we be certain that the church, with all imperfections, can be trusted to carry us on to maturity? As Dallas Willard answered, "Because Christ is the head of His church, and He knows what He's doing."