

Ephesians 4:11-16 (1984 NIV)
Growing in Christ, Going for Christ

Introduction

Our church founders named this church as Evangel Baptist Church 30 years ago. Inherent in this name, we find the aspirations of those who so chose it. “Evangel” means “Gospel” or “Good News”. I can surmise at least two reasons why this choice of name:

- First, this name was chosen because our founders would like the church not only to believe that it had received the Good News in Jesus Christ, but also to live out this Good News.
- Second, this name was chosen because our founders would like the church not only to enjoy the Good News in Jesus Christ as a Body, but also to share this Good News with the lost.

I believe these aspirations are still very much alive in us today.

The renowned Bible expositor John Stott once said that our corporate identity as a church makes us God’s “new society” here on earth. Indeed, we are to grow and go in this new identity.

- To grow here does not simply mean to change, but to change to the degree of being built up.
- And to go here does not mean to go away hiding from the world as if we are some “secret society”. Rather, it means to go into the world and impact it as God’s “new society”.

You will agree with me that the fact we are going to be 30 does not mean that our growing and going is 30 times more today than when we first started. Growing and going is not simply a matter of years, but of committed will and effort on our part as we respond and depend on the Lord at the same time.

As we look back to our past 30 years, we want to be thankful to the Lord’s faithfulness all these years.

And with the never-failing faithfulness of God as our motivation, how does our church keep growing and going as God’s “new society”?

The Apostle Paul, founding father of many growing and going churches in the 1st century, gives us a couple of exhortations in Eph. 4:11-16. One thing that Paul exhorts the church to do in order to keep growing and going is to ...

I. Grow big on service, grow small on self (vv. 11-13).

Today, we give thanks to God for the people who have been a part of this church. God not only has given us these people, He also has gifted them and called them to serve in and through this church. You also remember the many who have been nurtured in this church, and answered the call to full-time ministry. Some of these people are sitting right here among us today. And so we say, “We thank God as we remember how He has challenged those among us to serve according to His gifting and calling.”

Paul says in Eph. 4:11—“It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers ...”

I believe this list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to give us some examples of the Lord gifting different people so that they can contribute significantly to the growth and building up of the church.

In the same way, as we remember the many who have faithfully served the church with their giftedness, be reminded that God in His own faithfulness has given us these people.

Indeed, Evangel has a proud history to look back—many faithful men and women, obedient to the Lord’s calling, have stepped out to serve Him and others with their giftedness. Do not let this become a mere history of the past, but let this proud history repeat itself in and through Evangel until the Lord comes again.

Today as look ahead, we must not just say to God, “Lord, we thank you for our past generations of godly and faithful servants.”

No, look above and beyond, and say to God this day, “Lord, we thank you for our past generations of godly and faithful servants whom we can remember as part of our history. Now, raise up among us another generation of godly and faithful servants whom you will use to make history for you.” Will you be open to let God so challenge you today?

Even as we serve the Lord in the Body, let’s be cautioned of two pitfalls:

- First, be cautioned that self-serving intentions are not hidden behind a false front of works of service.

An American pastor named Tommy Tenney once shared this experience. During the years of his pastorate, a man came to his church with the intention to divide his congregation. He was starting a new church and hoped to use some members of Pastor Tenney’s congregation to help him.

Pastor Tenney sensed God so spoke to him, “Become this man’s servant.” So instead of avoiding and isolating him, the pastor sought to serve this man. He even invited this man to preach and sent the musicians from his congregation to help with the special services in this man’s new church.

When the time came, the man played his final card and started to lambaste Pastor Tenney with some wild accusations. But a strange thing happened. No one believed what he said. They had seen how their beloved pastor became a servant to this man, and they were watching this divisive person reveal his true character. By the lives of the two men, they could distinguish the shepherd of God’s sheep from the thief of God’s sheep.¹

This happened to an American pastor. But I am sure many of our pastors and church leaders in Singapore can identify with the situation as well. God may not want them to respond in the same way. But God has the same lesson for them—i.e. God does not need people to fight for control; He needs people who will be servants. The spirit of a servant-leader is what will create unity. A servant-leader does not fight for control. A servant-leader does not seek pre-eminence for himself, but only seeks the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. A servant-leader shows God’s people the true way of Kingdom living by growing big on service and small on self.

For those who are called to serve the church in various capacities, they must remember that when God calls them to serve, it is to serve Him and others, not themselves. Indeed, we all are not to become self-serving givers—giving our service in order to push our agenda, or to promote ourselves.

- Second, be cautioned that works of service do not stunt the spiritual growth of believers and encourage them to shirk personal responsibilities.

There must be a certain sense of pride as we prepare to turn 30. We are to be built up, to grow up, to become mature, to attain the fullness of Christ ... and to take pride in working towards this.

Those who are gifted by the Lord to serve us are not so much our servants, but servants of Christ. They are neither given by God to serve us forever nor to make us dependent on them forever.

¹Tenny, Tommy. *God’s Dream Team*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1999, pp. 63-64.

Rather, they are given by God to us so that we can learn to do the same things by their example and by them equipping us. That's what Paul meant in Eph. 4:12-13—some are gifted and called to serve by way of preparing others to serve, to mature, and to attain the fullness of Christ.

As we grow and go from year to year, the Lord is calling us to press on in Christlikeness, not to remain in childishness. He doesn't want His people to remain in spiritual infancy—always wanting to be pampered, to seek attention, to be takers all the time.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we can forget many things over a period of 30 years. Lest you forget, remember that your leaders are called by God to work with you, and together for God. They cannot and should not do everything for you, no matter how gifted they are. They would have failed God and you if they have not prepared and equipped you to serve, to mature, and to attain the fullness of Christ. They would have failed if they have allowed you to believe that God exists to serve you and your needs. But God has called them to lead you away from this self-serving attitude to the realization that you exist to serve God and His Kingdom.

I am proud to be counted as one who belongs to Evangel Baptist Church. But I am also mindful that there's a bigger Body out there with which I need to identify and connect with as brothers and sisters in the Lord. However, every believer should first seek to be associated and involved in a local church. And when one's place of service is found in the local church, then go beyond and seek also to bless the bigger community.

In the course of the pilgrimage of Evangel, we have been blessed with leaders who seek to serve God and others instead of self. We have also been blessed with members who in turn have grown up spiritually to serve God and one another instead of self.

Indeed, this is what Paul stresses when he says in v. 12 that God's people (both church leaders and members) do works of service not to build up the individual reputation and ego, but to build up the Body of Christ. Yes, we are exhorted to build up the local church, and even above and beyond, to build up the bigger Christian community, but never the self and its ego.

So, we ask God to help us keep this proud tradition of "works of service". We ask Him to help us repeat this good part of our history in our future generations. We ask God to give each of us a heart's desire to grow big on service and small on self.

There have been “ups and downs” in our 30 years as a church. Come what may, we need to keep growing and going. The Word of God gives us another exhortation, and that is to ...

II. Grow big on Christ, grow small on man (vv. 14-16).

One of the churches that Paul founded was the Church of Corinth. It was a church that was much blessed as far as spiritual gifts were concerned. The people were so gifted that the church did not seem to lack anything. The Corinthians thought they were indeed spiritually gifted AND mature.

But spiritual giftedness may not necessarily be an indication of spiritual maturity. Note what Paul said to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 3:1-4: “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ ... For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?”

Yes, Paul described the spiritually gifted Corinthians as still infants. Why? One key reason is because of their tendency to look up to men, not Christ. Some said, “We follow Paul.” Others said, “We follow Apollos.” But none said, “We follow Christ.”

The Corinthians seemed to depend more on their illustrious leaders than on Christ. They grew big on man, but small on Christ.

I have a friend whose family background was very complicated at one time. Her father was debt-ridden because he borrowed from loan sharks. One brother was a habitual gambler. Another was a hard-core drug addict.

By the grace of God, there was a spiritual awakening in the family through a chain of events. The parents and the gambling brother came to know the Lord.

Everything was going on fine until the converted brother became greatly disillusioned by the pastor. In fact, he collapsed into a severe state of mental depression.

My friend said something to me that sent a chill down my spine. She said, “My brother has very high expectations of the pastor and all full-time workers. When the pastor fails to live up to what he expects of him, his faith becomes shaken and he just breaks down.”

Yes, while we expect our church leaders to be models and examples of faith, we must also remember that at the same time, they are also human. If we forget this, we can then grow big on man, but small on Christ. We either accept all their teachings in an undiscerning manner

without measuring them against Scripture, or we expect them to be like gods who can do no wrong.

And Paul, likely drawing from his own experience with the Corinthian Church, warned the Ephesians (and us today) that to grow big on man but small on Christ is to live out an infantile mentality. He said in v. 14 that an infant is easily tossed about by “every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Many people have from time to time appeared on the scene to promote some new religious fads and fashions in the name of Jesus Christ. And their teachings are attractive because they feature the latest things in town.

But Paul warns us that if we keep riding on the waves of every new religious fad and fashion, we can become unstable like spiritual infants being tossed about, and not knowing for sure what’s right and what’s wrong.

In 1997, Nathan Zohner, a 14-year-old student at Eagle Rock Junior High School in Idaho Falls (USA), conducted a science fair project and won first prize. He received a lot of attention from newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations, universities, and congress people.

His project involved presenting a report about “The Dangers of Dihydrogen Monoxide”. Such dangers include:

- It can cause excessive sweating and vomiting.
- It is a major component of acid rain.
- It can cause severe burns in its gaseous state.
- Accidental inhalation can kill you.
- It contributes to erosion.
- It decreases effectiveness of automobile brakes.
- It has been found in tumours of terminal cancer.

Zohner asked fifty 9th grade students what (if anything) should be done about the chemical. Forty-three students favoured banning it, six were undecided, and only one correctly recognized that “dihydrogen monoxide” is actually H₂O—plain old water.

It’s true that dihydrogen monoxide (water) can pose all of the dangers mentioned. Yet, the majority in Zohner’s study did not recognize it by its REAL NAME!²

² https://www.sermonillustrator.org/illustrator/sermon3/desire_to_know_his_ways.htm

Many false teachings by deceitful fakes are prevailing these days. You need to discern with spiritual maturity and identify them by their real name.

Indeed, we need to guard ourselves against false teachings of deceitful fakes. But there is something even more dangerous that we need to guard ourselves against—the false security we have in our own doctrinal fences.

I have the privilege to minister the Word in many non-Baptist churches. One common compliment I receive is this—“Baptists know the Word well.” Indeed, as Baptists, we often pride ourselves on being “people of the Word”. We guard the teachings of the Word and stay true to Scripture. We build up strong doctrinal fences to protect God’s commands and keep ourselves from transgressing them. Indeed, as Baptists, we believe that we know what’s right and what’s wrong; what’s truth and what’s falsehood. We can recognize sin by its real name and keep it out with all our doctrinal fences.

It is not wrong to have fences to protect the purity of God’s Word and ourselves from the ways of sinful living. The problem is that we may have these fences so high and thick that we cannot see, we cannot touch, we cannot hear, we cannot feel, and we cannot taste the reality of God in our lives. And our Christianity becomes all rules and no relationship because it is all about “cannot do this and cannot do that”.

Some churches rule that you cannot play drums in church—the noise is too irreverent. But God’s Word in the OT (e.g. 1 Chronicles 13:8 & Psalms 150:5) exhorts us to worship God with the “clashing of cymbals”. If you want to know how the “clashing of cymbals” sounds, go watch a lion dance! Yes, drums can be potentially distracting in worship, but not inherently irreverent.

Some churches also rule that women cannot wear make-up in church—cosmetics make them look too worldly.

When asked what he thought about women wearing make-up in his church, the late Adrian Rogers (pastor of one of the biggest Southern Baptist churches in the US during his time) replied, “Is it sin for women to wear make-up? I think for some women, it is a sin not to wear make-up!”³

No offence to those who wear make-up today, but you know what I mean.

Indeed, rigid fence-building can turn us into judgmental people; not Scripture-submitting, Spirit-led people.

³ A humour from one of Pr. Adrian Roger’s sermons.

I wonder what fences the Lord is challenging us to hack down this day. Yes, we need fences to help us stay within God's boundaries. But as we grow individually as a believer and collectively as a church these 30 years, have these fences turned into something that promotes rituals rather than relationship between us and God; have these fences turned into something that promotes legalism rather than lordship in our lives?

As Baptists, we pride ourselves on being the "people of the Word" because we have fences to guard what the Bible says in the text. But with the Spirit's help, we need to go beyond what the Bible says in the text to what the Bible says about God's heart in the text. Only then will we move from understanding words to undertaking worship; from devotional rituals to devoted relationship.

Otherwise, we end up not keeping out sin and falsehood with our fences, but caging ourselves in as prisoners of our own undoing because we have mistaken legalism as love for God. Are there some high and thick fences we need to hack down today?

Indeed, when we look at the experience of the Ephesians, we can see how subtle and dangerous these fences can be. In Rev. 2:1-7, we read of the Ephesian believers being commended for all their good and right works.

These include fences they raise to keep themselves approved by God. But the Lord has something against them—their loss of first love for Him, and even for one another. Doesn't it sound strange that in spite of doing everything so right and good, the Lord still calls on the Ephesian Church to repent in Rev. 2?

Perhaps, by staying within their fences and doing good works and right deeds, they have become mere keepers of God's law and not lovers after God's heart.

Yes, we need to guard ourselves against false teachings of deceitful fakes. But there is something even more dangerous that we need to guard ourselves against—the false security we have in man-made and humanly biased doctrinal fences.

Paul calls on us today not to grow big on man and small on Christ. Instead, he said in v. 15—"Grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ." Paul exhorts us today to move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity by growing big on Christ and small on man.

Today, Evangel has many reasons to thank the Lord for the many who have taught, led and served the church without guile and deceit. We should be proud to name them as a part of our church heritage. But in spite of all that they have done, we as a church must learn to say together, "We don't belong to any man. But we belong to Christ, the Head of our church."

Gifted men and women come and go. While we thank the Lord for their contributions, we must not build a cult personality around any of them. Ultimately, we look up to Christ rather than to man. We grow big on Christ, small on man.

And Paul shows in v. 16 how the church can grow together in such Christ-centeredness:

- We are to grow by building up one another in love. This implies a mutual acceptance of one another. You are where you are because that's where God wants you to be. He places you with other Christians here because they need you and you need them.

Do you realise that Jesus' 12 disciples (Matt. 10) were actually an unlikely team rather than a dream team? You have Matthew who was pro-Roman as a tax collector. But you also have Simon the Zealot who was anti-Roman as a freedom fighter. These two were poles apart. But Jesus put them in the same team. He wanted them to learn to accept and work with each other, and together with the other disciples.

Indeed, Jesus put you where you are in Evangel. You are to stay and learn to live and work with one another so that you can grow and be built up together, though you can be so diverse in many ways.

- We are also instructed that we can grow together only when "each part (not one part) does its work". You may be only able to give a friendly smile and a warm handshake at the door. But that may be the very reason why people are encouraged to come again—a small part, yet a very important part.

As we look back at our past 30 years, thank God today for His gifted servants and for one another. Nevertheless as we look ahead, continue to trust ultimately in Christ rather than man, though we recognize the need for each person to do his/her part in order to grow and to be built up together.

Conclusion

We want to keep growing in Christ and going for Him. The Lord calls us this day to:

- *Grow big on service, grow small on self.* Be generous in serving God and others, and cautious of our own self-serving ego.
- *Grow big on Christ, grow small on man.* Look beyond man's talents and flaws, and to Christ Himself as your example of loving, serving, and giving to one another.

As Evangel Baptist Church, we have a proud name to live up to—growing up to testify to the Good News we have in Jesus Christ, and going out to share this Good News with the lost.

Evangel Baptist Church, you are 30 years old. I want to end by saying this to you, “You still look beautiful today! I pray that the Lord will continue to keep you beautiful as you grow in Christ and go for Christ for many more years to come. Amen!”