

BODY BUILDING

Sermon by Pastor Scott Lowther

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What we are going to look at today is Ephesians Chapter 4. We are going to cover a few verses then come back to it.

I want to give you a preface to get you guys thinking. If you think church is simply this: Going to a service and maybe a class now and then – that's not all a church is. As a matter of fact, I think that is a cause of many churches problems. If you look at what is Christianity; what has God called the body of Christ to be? If you say "well, it's just go to church, sing a couple of songs, have somebody preach to us for a while, and then go eat at In 'N Out Burger" – then you don't get it. It's probably why so many people in the body are hurting. So many are sick, not physically, but emotionally and spiritually. It's why the body dysfunctions. What that does, that mindset causes there to become too much pressure and too much expectation from the ordained leaders and not enough from the body itself. As a matter of fact, the distinction between clergy and laity is not even a biblical one. If you think there are certain professionals that we pay so that they can do certain things in the body, such as visit the sick, pray, minister to the new believers, that certainly is their responsibility but it is also yours. If you are not functioning in those capacities, it's why the body is sick. I want you to start thinking about that. The bible calls us to have these dynamic, interpersonal, real relationships where we get involved in each other's lives.

Secular psychologists, not even Christian ones, treat people in one of 3 ways.

- (1) They do what is called "one on one" counseling or psychotherapy. Right? Christians do that too but it's called mentoring.
- (2) Then what the secular psychologists do is they say "let's get a group of people that all have the same issues, stick them in a room together, and that can be a support group for them." Well, we do the same thing and it's called "home fellowship".
- (3) What the secular people do is give you dope and they medicate you. If they can't fix you one of those 2 ways, they just medicate you. But we have the Holy Spirit who is the Great Physician.

So we've got better than what the world offers but people in the world know when there is a problem, that's what they do. When Christians see there's a problem, first most often they don't see it, and second of all they don't do anything about it. So there are remedies functioning properly. If you think the church is solely about once a week, or once every 2 weeks, visiting church for an hour – that's not Christianity. That's not what you are called to do. That's not what the church is called to do. "Well, I take an extra class". Good for you, I'm glad that you do but there is more than that. You need to be involved with other believers. You need to be involved with interpersonal relationships where you speak the truth to one another in love and you build up the body.

That's what we are going to talk about today. If the world does it, the church should do it all the more. One of MacArthur's pastors said this: *"The distinction between the clergy and the laity is unscriptural and perhaps the greatest single hindrance to the spread of the gospel"*. Do you remember in Revelation Chapter 2, there was Jesus talking to the Church of Pergamum, and he said, "Some of you are believing or being sucked into the doctrine of the Nicolaitans". As a matter of fact, the Nicolaitans most scholars believe, you hear the word laity in there. It meant there's this distinction between the clergy and the laity. The clergy were the people who were supposed to be all the "doers" and the laity was the people who were supposed to be all the recipients of it. That's not biblical at all; as a matter of fact it ruins churches. So what we are talking about today is God's biblical definition for what we are to be.

I'm not saying that pastors shouldn't do certain things. I have had more people come in this week than I think I had in all my history that I have been here. People with questions. Some of them are really great; some of them are kind of weird; but a lot of them are good. They say "What's a pastor supposed to do?" I say, "Well, I'll tell you. Let's see what the bible says about that". That surprises them that you would say let's see what the bible says. They say, "No, you tell me what you are going to do and what do you think about this". I say, "Well, it doesn't matter what I think", it matters what God said. So let's look at what God said because that's going to cure all the issues. My opinion doesn't matter anymore than your opinion matters. What matters is what God has said". So we focus on those issues. Often I'll preface and say "Well, what is it that you think a pastor should do?" I start unloading all this stuff, right? Then they say these things, "You know, I haven't made my mind up yet". I'm thinking is that a threat or something? I say, "Look, if you don't know, that's fine. You vote your conscience; you vote as God leads. That's fine. I'm not here to sway you. I'm just here to tell you what I believe what the word of God says on that topic". After they talk for 15 minutes about all the stuff I am supposed to do and then I show them in the bible what's real and what's false expectation; I say "Do you know that the bible is a lot about what you are supposed to do too?" Then they get all sweaty and they want to leave! They say, "I've taken up so much of your time, I really got to get going now. Thanks for the visit though".

So the point of me bringing that to you is we're going to talk about all of us as a body is supposed to do. The pastoral stuff isn't any different that you. The elders aren't any different from you. We have different functions but we're all sheep. Each of us has a role and we use the gifts that God has given so that we can accomplish what God wants in the body. We don't do it to the exclusion of these other things. Sure, I'd like to visit the sick. Primarily that's not a pastor's job. Sure I'd like to evangelize but that's everybody's job. I'd love to pray with people but that's your job too.

So let's see biblically as we move forward what everybody's role is and when we do our roles, then the body of Christ is going to be built up. I think perhaps there's probably been no more damaging concept than the whole, sole role of the member of the church is simply to bring unbelievers in. That is not a biblical concept whatever. The biblical concept is for each of us to heed Jesus' calling. In Matthew 28 each of us is called to evangelize or each of us is called out to share our faith. You say, "I don't know who to do that". Well, our job is to equip you to do that. Our job is not to say "If you don't want to do it, that's OK". Our job is to say, "Before the Lord, when he saved you, he gave you his marching orders

and these are them". If we take that from you and let you stay in a state of immaturity, you'll never going to know the joy of praying with somebody who received Christ. You'll never know the joy of having God work for you to bring people to life. That is the greatest of joys and we don't want to see you robbed of that. That will stifle your faith. We are trying to address things in a biblical fashion and move forward in a way that everybody understands the biblical principles and mandates for church life.

I don't have a problem with unbelievers coming to church. I like them to come to church. I want them to come to church and I want them to have **1 Corinthians 14** experience where Paul says: **"when an unbeliever comes in your midst they fall on their face and said God is in the place"**. I don't want an unbeliever to come in and leave saying, "Well, that was nice" and feel no conviction that they need Christ. That's tragic. So our churches' goal is: to evangelize those outside and to build up those inside. That's a two-fold requirement of every church; every church before the Lord. My prayer is that we become that way. That we're known for that; that we're known for speaking the truth.

Let's go to our text.

Ephesians 4:4-16

English Standard Version (ESV)

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.⁸Therefore it says,

***"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men."***

⁹(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?^[a] ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors^[b] and teachers,^[c] ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,^[d] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We could say "amen" and take it to heart and go home.

Let's look at these things because I believe with all my heart that God wants to speak to us about them. Our goal, the goal of the church is right here in verse 16: , **¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped** (that's a preface) , **when each part** (here's

another preface) ***is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*** So the goal in verse 16 is it is totally dependent on verse 12. I'll give you an outline of where we're going in the next few weeks. We're going to talk about the grounds of the church (verses 4-6); the gifts of the church (verses 7-11); and then the goal of the church (verses 12-16). So let's go back, and we'll look at verses 4-6 which we are focusing on specifically today.

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There are 7 "**one**" statements here if you count them. People are into numerology and I don't mean the evil numerology. The number 7 is very specific in the bible. It's the number of perfection; it's the number that God often refers to: 7 days of creation and on the 7th day he rested. There's a lot of significance there but what I want you to see is this unity that is there. There's **one**. There's **one** God. There's **one** faith. There's **one** redeemer. There's **one** truth. There's **one** everything and we are the sole recipients of that. What I want you to think of is those things are "**one**" no matter what you think; no matter what I think. "Well, I think everybody is saved". Well, we're both thinking wrong if we think that. The truth is there's a broad path that leads to destruction and most are on it. There's a narrow path that leads to life and the people that are on that path aren't the people who are better than the others; or the people who are better off. But they are better off because of Jesus Christ not because of something in themselves. We have been given this body of truth and it is our responsibility (we talked about this last week) to walk in a manner worthy of the call but also to contend for that truth. These "**one**" statements are God's emphasis of saying, "This is what I have given you. And what I have given you is reality".

The question back in Chapter 2 of: Is there a distinction with Jew and Gentile? Can they be "**one**" in a church? Can they be "**one**" in the body of Christ? Paul said "absolutely, yes". ***Ephesians 2:16-17: "There is "one" body that Christ has reconciled all the people in him into "one" body, and he has taken those people who were far off and he has bought them near"***. When Brad was talking about the Muslims, I noticed the congregation to see how they respond. Often when a Christian hears the word Muslim they get kind of tense. The reason they get all tense is because a lot of the things that have been perpetrated lately. Let me ask you this: Is a Muslim any more evil than a Buddhist? Is he any more evil than a Hindu? Or are they all equally deceived and they all need Jesus? Do you feel the weight of people who perish? Or do you just go, "Well, they get what they deserve". My fear is that because of the things that happened in the world where people run amuck and are being deceived into deceiving others; we lose the commandment of the Lord – to go to all the world and preach the gospel. To cry out to God, "Lord, would you save these people". And pray with empathy. To love them as you love yourself. The reason that we don't is because we're gripped with fear; we're gripped with all kinds of things that the Lord would have us to lay down and walk with him and trust him.

Let's look at this **oneness**; this unity that the church has; this complete sole possession of truth. Why should I feel the weight? I'll give you reasons why because if there was any other God; if there was any other hope; if there was any other faith; if there was any other way for a man to be saved; then it

doesn't matter. But the truth of the word of God is there is **one** God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and there is no other name given among men whereby a man can be saved. That's truth whether we think it or not. If it doesn't grip our heart, then we won't have compassion for those who are lost because we think there's many ways. Every road leads to God. Some are judged; **one** is redeemed. That's reality and we have to have that grip our heart. So our mission outside the church is foundational to these 7 truths. Our mission inside the church is foundational to these 7 truths. We are looking for unity.

We are going to sidetrack for a little bit because I felt really compelled last night to talk about the burden that we should have for lost people. Let's look at Romans Chapter 1. I want you to feel what's going on with Paul's life.

Romans 1:14-16: ¹⁴ *I am under a debtor both to the Greeks and to barbarians,^[a] both to the wise and to the foolish.* ¹⁵ *So for my part I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome.* I want you to take the Rome part off and put in any country you want. I want this to be true of you. ¹⁵ *So I am eager to preach the gospel to you who are in* Sudan, to you who are in Africa, to you who are in Mexico, to you who are in Canada. I want you to feel the biblical call for a missional mindset. I don't mean the kind of missions where you work on your tan in Australia on the Great Barrier Reef and call that a mission's trip. That is not a mission's trip. That is wasting God's resources to take a glorified vacation. I'm talking about going to places where people haven't heard; where people will die and go to hell, all the while thinking they're pleasing a God they know not. Paul says here that he is in debt. He doesn't say he is in debt to God. I think it's really important that you see this. He says **"I am in debt"** and who is he in debt to? **"Both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; to the wise and to the foolish"**. Why is he in debt? Why does he feel he is in debt? Back in chapter 1, verse 5 he says he is in debt because he has received grace unto salvation but grace to be an apostle. And that grace has compelled him to discern his call to be a debtor to men. I want it to be very clear – he is not in debt to God. If you receive grace and you think you are now in debt to God, grace isn't grace to you anymore. Grace is grace when it comes as the unmerited gift. Grace doesn't put you in debt to God. God does not want you to pay him back. That's offense to him. If I pay off your mortgage and you say, "Wow, that's really awesome that you paid off the mortgage now I am going to give you a penny every week until I pay you back" – that insults the gift. I'm like, "I gave you a gift. I don't want your dumb penny". The more times you try to offer me the penny, the more irritated I am going to get with you because you don't discern it's a gift.

Paul is saying I have not gone in debt to God. Or sin puts us in debt to God. The wages of sin is death. The great news is that grace pays our debts. The grace of God pays our debt in Jesus Christ. It pays our sin debt so we are righteous as Jesus Christ is in the atonement. That's a whole different study but that's the truth. Paul is saying he is not in debt to God because grace would no longer be grace if he looked at it like that, but the grace of God compels him to be in debt to others. So grace does not make you an indebted to God.

As a matter of fact, gratitude is a very bad motivator to serve God. It will always fail you. The biblical model and the biblical precedent for what fuels my serve to the God, is not gratitude, it is grace. Gratitude in a weird twisted mindset, and this is how it manifests itself, "I have served the Lord for so

long, sincerely, when is it going to be my turn to get ... (blank)?" That comes from a debtor's ethic mindset which is evil. It's "God has done so much for me now if I do this, I merit something from him". That's evil. It doesn't understand grace. Understanding of grace changes the heart. What happened with Paul is it changed his heart.

So why is that he is in debt to the people that he doesn't know? A debt usually means that somebody has given you something and you are obligated to repay it or somebody has loaned you something and you have to give it back. Right? This is what the term means.

So these barbarians and these Greeks didn't give Paul anything other than a hard time. So why is this case? I'm going to share one thought with you then we'll get back to our text. If you have received grace and you've come to know the redeeming love of Jesus Christ and freed yourself from your eternal torment in hell for rejecting God and trampling him underfoot; if you received that, and you know you've received it, you've become a debtor to tell others about it. If that's not your case, then something has shipwrecked. Why am I indebted? Why should this be the case? Why should this grip my heart so much? Because, if you receive grace and if you withhold telling people of that grace, because you feel that you were qualified for it, or you're better off than them, or these other people aren't qualified for it, you show that you have never known grace at all. You've shown that you've never know it. When it grips your heart it becomes "my life is not my own. I am bought with a price. The grace that came to me came completely unmerited, undeserving. I see a person there that needs it as much as I did and my heart is compelled to say something about it. My heart puts me in debt to others because my fellow man is perishing and why should I be the sole recipient of grace and not them too. Or more importantly, why is it I don't care? Why is it I think they're getting what they deserve?" "These things shouldn't be and that manifests itself outside and more hurtful as it manifests to those inside; inside the body. "Well that person is just reaping what they sowed. What a bunch of losers". That is not the way things should be in people that know grace.

My challenge to you is to see the heart of God in the way he talks about his church and that grace would well up in you and flow out. Not because people have earned it from you but because you received it. Not because anybody will earn anything from me but because we are in debt to those who don't have it. If Paul can see his life like that, do you think that maybe we should too? So instead when the missionary of the month comes up and we go, "Oh, that's really great. When are you going to leave?" – Why don't we take that same attitude and say, "You know what, I can do one of 3 things: I can pray, and I will; I can go and I should; or I can support you because I can make more money by staying here to support you than by going myself." In any case, can you not feel the burden of people who cry out who don't know the Lord? All the more you see the end approaching. We should be the most passionate people for the salvation of our family and friends; than any group of people ever. Our generation should be more zealous for that than any generation that has ever lived. The fact that it is not, shows the church has become so aberrant that we've got a lot of fixing to do.

Sinclair Ferguson said this: "*The way to open our hearts to others is by receiving afresh the grace of God and appreciating what it means; seeing our own need of Christ; coming to receive his mercy; sensing how undeserved his love for us is and remembering he has also opened his heart to those whose hearts are closed*"

against his. Then we will see the heart which is too narrow to receive a fellow Christian is too narrow to enthrone the Lord Jesus Christ. But the heart that is open to receive the grace of Christ will learn to welcome all those whom Christ himself has welcomed or will welcome."

That's the heart that received grace. The more you understand the grace of God, the lower your self-esteem and your arrogance goes. Those who know grace are the most gracious of all people. It doesn't mean they waffle on truth, but it means they are gracious and longsuffering because they understand the grace they have been given.

Let's see this grace flowing in our text. Verse 7: **"*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift*".** Paul turns from verse 4-6 where he says this is what we have in common and now he is starting to say about what you have as an individual. He wants to talk about something different. The point here is the power of the church lies in each Christian discovering and spiritually using the spirit gift that God has given to each of us. Now each of us has received a gift. Look what Paul says, "Grace was given to each one". Each of you. You were born with some abilities, whatever they are. But you were reborn in Christ with a spiritual gift. Sometimes it's related; often times it's not. The gift that you have been given has been given for a purpose and the purpose is the edification and building up of his body. That's the reason that the gift was given and it came as a means of grace.

So as I said before, pastors have gifts. But the gift was given as a gift of grace and that's a gift to the body. You've been given a gift and your gift is a gift to the body. As that gift functions, the body is built-up. What we need to return to is a biblical understanding of the exercising of your gifts is the way the body of Christ is built-up. Not by the ordained "clergy". That's not how the body is built-up. We equip the saints so the saints minister. It's funny we're called ministers but the real ministers are you and we're part of that because we are all sheep. We just have different functions. If you see that, then it's more helpful for you to discern what your role might be. So isn't that the way a physical body functions? If one part of your body gets sick, what happens? The whole body's sick. Right? If your stomach muscles act up, you can throw up, just because they are acting up. It doesn't mean there is something wrong with your hand. But for the hand to say "I'm perfectly fine. You're throwing up but I work great!" It doesn't discern that we are part of a body. Our body has been very sick and we're coming to places where God is bringing healing. You have to understand that you as a member, as a part of the body, whatever church you are in, you will be part of a healing, edifying, blessing or you'll be part that brings cancer. Which part are you? I think God wants to speak to you about that.

The mission's statement. People ask me do I have a vision or mission for the church. I say, "God has one". A mission, the mission of the church, the mission for us would be something like this: Every member a minister. Simple but the mission of our church would be that every person functions their spiritual gift in the body so that the body is built-up, the Lord is glorified and Jesus is seen in the public arena. That would be the goal; that would be a biblical thought. That's what we have to focus on. The point is from all this rambling, is that you have a gift. If you say that you don't, you're calling God a liar. You say, "I don't have a gift". Liar. Because what's the other option, God's a liar? "I am the Lord, I change not. You thought I was a man but I don't lie". God doesn't lie. If you don't believe this, it's a

bigger issue, but you have been given a gift, and that gift has been determined and given to you by Christ's generosity.

We have 2 words for gift. The Greek word is **doxa**. It means what is given. What the verse 7 here is talking about, there is a gift that was given to you, but the gift that was given to you is named in this verse, it's Christ. Christ is the unmerited gift that was given to each of us and from that comes a spiritual gift. So this is a distinction.

Philo the First Century Greek Historian wrote what this word meant to that culture, "the most valuable of all gifts." So the most valuable of all gifts isn't your spiritual gifts; the most valuable of all gifts is the gift of life in Jesus Christ. OK. So that's the 1st gift you have been given. So you say, "I haven't got a gift". That's a good one. That's a really good one.

Let's go to verse 8 to see what's our other gift is. ***"Therefore it says, when he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."*** This gift is **doxa**, which mean "a divine gift that has been imparted to you." This quote here is a loose quote of Psalm 68. It's a conquering psalm about David writing about the returning of a triumphant king. If you know history back in those days, if you guys ever watch the old gladiator movies, the guys will go out conquering and they would come back and they would lead back captives that they didn't kill. The captives they would bring back, this is referring to Christians, it's not saying that he ascended a list of captives not being Christians are the captives, but Jesus has taken captive is the things that were crippling us. He has taken the enemy Satan captive; he has taken death; and he has destroyed sin. So he has captivated that to set us free. When the king would return, the king would bestow spoils on the people. He would go by throwing out money and throwing out jewels and whatever he captured from his campaign to the people. He would share his wealth; he would share what he has obtained with his subjects. Even people who were enemies, if they subjected themselves to him, they would receive things too because it was the king's generosity. It was the property of a hero to be generous. What this passage is loosely paraphrasing in Psalm 68 is "the Lord in his glorious triumph has dispensed gifts to his people". He has dispensed gifts and each of us has a gift.

If you want to talk about spiritual gifts, there are 2 twelves' and there are 2 fours. I'll give them to you quickly and you can look them up: Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4 – all list the spiritual gifts. When we talk about spiritual gifts it's interesting when somebody says "What do you believe about spiritual gifts?" I go, "What do you believe about spiritual gifts?" Everybody has a reason. One guy said "Well, I believe I have the gift of miracles". I said, "Really, show me". Let's cut to the chase. Jesus said "Of men born of woman there is no one greater than John the Baptist". Right? He goes, "yes". I said, "John the Baptist didn't speak in tongues nor do miracles. But John the Baptist had one thing going for him; he prepared the way for the Lord. Everything he did was a nice easy fit for Jesus to step in. The greatest gift God would ever give you would be a function like that. That would not draw attention to you, but draw attention to Him. Anything that doesn't do that, isn't a gift from God, it's something else". So we had this really great conversation and I said, "Look, the miracle gifts, I'm not saying God doesn't do miracles, I know that he does. But I'll tell you one thing; you need to put yourself in a position for his glory that you need a miracle before He's going to give you one". He's not

just going to give you one like “Well, I got out of bed today and there’s nothing I had going on so I just decided to go perform miracles.” - It doesn’t work like that! You go with Brad to the Sudan and see if God doesn’t give you a gift at that moment. You go to the hospital to pray for somebody who is sick and say, “God you have the gift of healing that you could give me to give them?” It’s not something you keep but something God gives to give away. That’s why scripture says “earnestly desire the best gifts”. You want the gift of healing when you are talking to somebody dying of AIDS. You don’t want the gift of wisdom then. “Well, let me tell you why this happened to you”. That’s not helpful. Pray, “Lord would you be gracious and heal this person from that iniquity”. And if God said “yes”, you wouldn’t run around and say you had a healing ministry. You would say “How great is the Lord to intervene and touch the life of somebody who is dying so that he would be glorified”. Most often you wouldn’t have the gift for the rest of your life. It would be something to give away.

Let’s look at what God says. Verses 9 & 10 we are not going to talk about today. We’ll come back to that. That simply is talking about what the ascension of Christ presupposes. It says he ascended – means he resurrected himself. He descended – some people say he went down to hell and fought Satan. That’s not true, that’s a heresy. Jesus said “It is finished”. When it says he descended it means that he incarnated himself. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. It also refers to his death. In his death it doesn’t say that he went down and fought Satan in an arm-wrestling tournament over the souls of people. That’s popular on TBN. It’s heretical to the bible. When Jesus said “It is finished”, he meant it is finished. There is nothing else to do. There’s confidence for the people who know the word of God.

He says some other great things here. The word “fill” means to satisfy so when he says he might fill all in all it means that he might satisfy all in all. So that’s a really great thing and we’ll look at it next week.

Verse 11 & 12. Now here’s where we all have individual gifts but then there’s gifts that God gives to the church as a whole. Let’s see what these gifts are. These are in gift form of people. ¹¹**And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors^[b] and teachers.** Now pastors and teachers, it’s not two roles here, it’s one. The word “and” doesn’t mean “this and this” it means “this is the second half” of that gift. Pastors/ teachers are one gift. **And he gave them to the body of Christ.** Why did he do that? You say, “Does he have anything else? I don’t like what I got”. Well, it may be true but take it up with the Lord. Verse 12 says the reason for that is ¹²**to equip the saints for the work of ministry.** So the church is gifted by Christ for people in varied offices but they are gift to the body just like the gift that God gave you as a gift to the body. We just have a different role. It says that we are given **for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry.**

Every word in scripture is important and this one’s really important. The word “equip” here is this. I’ll give it to you, see if hear a word that we use in English here. Katartidzo. We get our word “artisan”, a craftsman, a mechanic, somebody who works with his hands; somebody who does things with his hands to accomplish something. It’s interesting that this word “equip” is first used in the scripture in the calling of the disciples by Jesus at the Sea of Galilee. Jesus met two sets of brothers. He met Andrew and Peter and he met James and John. What were they doing when he met them on the lake? They were fishing but they were doing something else. They were fixing their nets. And the word

“mending” is the same word here “equipping”. Interesting, isn’t it? So the law of first usage goes here and you say, “Wow, that’s pretty insightful”. Jesus sees some people and they are mending the nets. And the pastor’s job is to mend the nets of the people. What does that mean? It means the nets were imperative for these guys to make a living to successfully do what there were called to do. You’re not much of a fisherman if you have a holy net. Why is that? Because you’re not going to catch much.

So the job of the pastor is not just visit the sick, or say prayers, or mow your lawn or whatever people think that the pastor’s job is. The role of the pastor is to come alongside the people and say, “Your net needs a little bit of mending and I’m here to help you mend your net so that you can go out and fish”. So with the gift that God gave you in your daily walk, in the place where God puts you, you are his ambassador, and that you recognize you are a fisher for the souls of men. You use whatever God gave you to reach those people because you have a burden for people who don’t know him. You see that you are in debt to them because of the grace that was given to you.

So we are here to equip you to mend your nets; to help you understand and discern God’s call for you; to stir up that gift in love; to equip you so that you can minister that way. That’s what it means to be a Christian. You go, “That’s not what I signed up for”. It’s because nobody told you the truth from the get go. Jesus said **“Pick up your cross, deny yourself and follow me”**. That was his marching orders. It wasn’t like, “Do what you want. Say a prayer. Go to heaven way down the road. The rest of your life I don’t care what you do”. That’s not Christianity. Jesus has very specific things that he prepared in advance that you would walk and that it would be glorious and joyful for you. Our job is to equip you and stir that up in you so it becomes your passion. So that you want to do that and go, “Man, there’s nothing better than that”. The day you get your mended net out in the water and you reel in your first fish, you’ll be hooked for life. You’ll be hooked for life. You’ll say “There’s no greater high; there’s no greater joy; there’s no more wonderful experience than seeing somebody pass from death to life”. There’s no greater joy than that.

Jesus knew it when he said **“it is greater to give than to receive.”** We live in such a narcissistic society when we say “That’s not true, it’s way better to get than it is to give!” They got it backwards. Our churches have it backwards. It is greater to give. I’m not talking money; I’m talking your life. It is greater to give your life than it is to receive anything else. They did not count their lives as worthy of anything but they pursued God with undivided heart. That’s what I think God would have for us.

So these **pastors are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry**. This word equip means a lot of things. It means getting ready; fitting it out; preparing. Thayer, who’s the expert in these fields of Greek words, said the word simply means: “to make it what it ought to be”. The pastor’s role is to help, with God working through them, to make the sheep what they ought to be. If you say, “You know what, you’re telling me what to do. I don’t like that”. I’m not telling you what to do, I’m telling you what God says should be true of you so that you will have joy; so that you would be passionate; so that your life will count; so that you’ll redeem the time; so that you will see God’s hand in your life like you’ve never seen it before. And that should be something that excites you. I’m not here to beat you up. I’m here to say, “Look, God has more for you”. God has more for us and we should be pursuing it with a passionate heart.

So what Paul wants to stress in our text, is not just the individual ministry. He wants to have a broad, global scope and address the entire body ministry. Not just the part but the whole. Many of us have not got this is our “ministries”. We segregate ourselves and focus on such a narrow scope of ministry that it doesn’t effectively impact the whole body. Your ministry should impact the whole body. Though you may do it in children’s ministry, it should have a global vision and purpose. In other words, should Eric come in and go, “I’m only going to play and lead worship for people between the ages of 18 and 22. The rest of you can all go home because that’s not my ministry” or “If there’s kids here under the age of 18, then we don’t want them because that’s not part of my ministry”

You don’t understand the bible call of ministry. The bible call of ministry is that it permeates and affects the entire body. There’s nothing wrong with being focused on one segment but that focus needs to funnel out. How does what I am doing funnel out to bless the rest of the body? How does it bring life here so it flows out and bring life elsewhere? God doesn’t want little clicky things. He wants a body that functions. He wants a body where each part interacts with other parts and that the ministry through here flows through here and comes over here. Just like this morning when the children sang. It should be a blessing to us to see them have a heart for the Lord and we pray that that continues. That is what God is after – that it flows into all parts of the body. All of it. I long for the day when high school and junior high go, “You know what, we want to come to church and be with the old guys because that would be a blessing for us to see our parents worship”. I long for that day. To stop the segregating of everybody but to bring people together as the body. I think God wants that for us as well.

So let’s continue. Verse 13 & 14. This is next week. A whole study in itself. I want you to see the subject of this text here is about maturity and discernment. It says “, ¹³**until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,^[d] to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.** So next week we are going to talk specifically about: Maturity of the body, not just unity, but maturity. What that maturity looks like; what discernment looks like; what the mature man of Jesus looks like here because it is not talking about his activity, but him as a person to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that’s a great, great, study and I encourage you to come and check that out.

Verse 15 & 16: “¹⁵**Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.** Now here’s where we are going to talk about the most misunderstood verses in the bible. People think that speaking the truth in love is just being rude. “You’re ugly, and you smell bad but I love you!” That’s not speaking the truth in love. That’s being kind of rude. It’s not being godly. When you talk about this verse, this is a verse that God says is essential for building up the body. So speaking the truth is this just things that are true or is it something that the text would determine and tell us is not probably what most of us think? We think that speaking the truth just means tell it like it is and deal with it. This is not what it means in the context.

Verse 11 says that there are people that God has given to equip the saints for the work in the ministry in truth. So they are truth-bearers. We equip the people with the truth. Verse 13 says that the goal of the building of the body is to attain the unity of the faith, so that the unity of faith would be in truth. Verse 14, which we'll see next week, is Paul's desire for them to be stable or mature in truth. So speaking the truth in love is speaking accurately who God is; who Christ is; what redemption is. That is speaking the truth in love. It is speaking biblically in love. The way the body is built up is when each member speaks biblical truth to the other members and inter-personal relationships. That's God's remedy. How do the saints minister to the body? The answer is this: By speaking the truth about God, about Christ, in love. Both are crucial. Truth without love is pretty harsh and Pharisee-like. But love without truth is sentimentality and hopeless. You need both. You need to be able to give it in a God-glorifying way. My desire for us as a body is we would be known for a place that speaks the truth in love from here as well as there. So that when people come in would say, "I have never met more God-glorifying, biblically speaking in truth group of people in my entire life. These people get what it means to be a Christian. They aren't swayed by every doctrine that comes along. They are solid and steadfast and mature in Christ". That's the heart I think of what God wants to do with us. That's why we are still here. I pray that He puts that in your heart to be part of that.

I am going to close with 2 things from Verse 16. I want you to see the weight of it now. Instead of illustrating with a story about a lost puppy, I'm going to give you an illustration from this text. So Verse 16 begins with the words ¹⁶ **from whom**. Who's the whom? The whom would be Jesus from verse 15. **the whole body**, the whole body what? There's no verb there. When you start pulling verses apart you got to look for the subject. The subject here is the whole body. Where's the verb? What does the whole body do? Well it has at the end of verse it says: **makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love**. So the sentence without the filler is this: Jesus Christ works through His body to build the body up. God doesn't work so much in this text, it doesn't say he doesn't work so much through you as an individual, which he does. But what this text says is that God works through the body to build up the body. The rest of the filler between is how that's done, how the body does that; it explains how the process takes place, but the whole body causes the growth of the body.

I'm back to where we started with this thought. Christ is the source of everything. If we as a body are going to grow and become all that God has for us, that will come as the body causes the growth of the body. Do you see that? If you say, "I want God to do everything". God will do everything but he works through you to accomplish this end. It's really critical that you see it. God works through the body so that it builds itself up. The body builds up the body and each one of us is a part of the body. Maybe you're a Christian here and your function in the body has been a little less than edifying. I pray that today that God convicts you of that and you say, "You know what God, I have been a person that spreads cancer in the body and I need to turn from it and I want to bring life. I want to be a source of health to the body. I want the body to recover; I want it to be strong; I want it to be glorifying to you; I want to take what once was not working right and I want to be something that brings wholeness." Maybe you're here and not a part of the body at all because you don't know the Lord, but God has a purpose to speak to you even in that.

Here's my last quote: ***"Grace does not grant permission for us to live in the flesh. It supplies power so that we can edify the body."*** If you received grace, our heart towards the lost is we should view them as debtors. Our heart towards the rest of the body should be: The greatest commandment is to love God. The second is like it - love your neighbor as yourself. In the same way that you love yourself, you should love the body. Isn't that what the scripture says about the husband and wife? That the husband should love the wife as he loves his own body. That's the way Jesus loves us. That's the way we, as the body, should love each other, the way we love ourselves. To the same extent that I am passionate when I don't have a job and I'm looking for a job, I should be just as passionate for somebody else who needs a job, in our body, to help them find it. The same way I am passionate about my walk, I should be passionate about somebody else's walk in the body. When I recognize that one part of the body doesn't function, the whole body doesn't function.

I think God's heart for us is simply to say this: What are you bringing into his body? That's an answer that I'll leave for you to answer with the Lord himself.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you so much for this opportunity to be in your word today. Thank you, more so, for the fact that you are a God who is rich in mercy; who is abundantly gracious; who forgives iniquity transgression and sin; who keeps mercy for thousands. I pray Lord for us as a people. I pray for those in this room, as well as myself. I pray Lord that you would bring to mind what we are bringing into your body. Are we an agent for life and health and wholeness? Do we speak the truth in love or have we been used by some outside force to bring confusion, sickness and hurt? Lord, I pray that your spirit would go through this place as the Great Physician. That you would infuse us with wholeness. That you would bring to our mind those things: attitudes we've had; actions we've taken. Those things we should turn away from once and for all and cast our cares upon you because you care for us. That we would move forward in a way that honors and glorifies you. With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, I'll just ask. Is there anybody here today who has never received Jesus Christ? You are outside of his body. You know if you've received him or not. The truth of the matter is you are dead in your trespasses and sins. You need to be forgiven. No amount of good deeds will make up for the fact that you've separated yourself from him by your sin. So if you're here today and you need Jesus Christ, I'd love to pray with you. For the person who'd like to receive Christ, it's simple as this: You open your life to him and you turn to him and God looks at the heart, not the words, so just pray with me: "Father, I turn from my way of living. I thank you for sending me a savior. I thank you that you gave me the ability to see my need. And I receive them. I turn from my old way of living and I ask you, Lord, to strengthen me to walk with you. To give me the ability to be a functioning part of your body that brings health and blessing; so that your body is built up. And so Lord, would you receive me. I thank you for it in Jesus name. Amen.

