



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 4: 7-16

Winter 2023-24

"Grow Or Die"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning; it is good to be with the saints. I mention that every Sunday. It's not an empty statement, it's a great thing to be with you in this church, and to do what we're doing, which is what the LORD would have us to do—and that's study His Word. And I think we see a great emphasis on that, and the importance of it, from our text this morning where Paul talks about the many gifts that Christ has given His church, and how He won them at the cross, and how we're to use them. Ephesians chapter 4, verses 7 through verse 16,

<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,

“When He ascended on high,  
He led captive a host of captives,  
And He gave gifts to men.”

*[Now, I want to stop and make a comment on that verse, because I will not say much, if even anything, about the “captives” that He took with Him. It's from one of the Psalms, (Ps 68:18), and David is speaking of the victory God won over all of Israel's enemies—and Paul sees the fulfillment of that in Christ and what He did on the cross.]*

*So who are these captives? He doesn't tell us. It would seem from the Psalm that they're the enemies that have been defeated. But there may be some suggestion from 2 Corinthians that the triumphal march that Christ made after His crucifixion was with His people whom He took 'captive' and transformed into His sons and daughters.*

*I think it's probably a reference to the enemy, (Colossians chapter 2, talks about how Christ dealt with the demonic forces, (Satan and all), and just His enemies in general). I think it may be, that Paul isn't interested in that. It could be either one, but I lean toward the enemies.*

*But I think what Paul sees here is just the complete victory of Christ, and that's what is so compelling to him. And it would be a distinction between those, (enemies), and His people—to whom He gave gifts; "And He gave gifts to men". 'He gave gifts to us', as Paul explains.]*

Now, verse 9,

<sup>9</sup>(Now this *expression*, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup>As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; <sup>15</sup>but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4: 7-16

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father again, it's a great privilege to be with Your saints on a Sunday morning, doing what You have instructed us to do, to '...not forsake the gathering together of the saints', (Heb 10:25), but join together and encourage one another, and build up each other. May You build us up in the faith this morning. May we have rich fellowship together in Your Word as we consider all that Your Son has done for us, all that He's given us, and the responsibilities that each one of us has to be serving each other and serving You—and doing a service that is of infinite value and has eternal reward.

So what a blessing to consider that, Father, that You have given us gifts. You've given us the means that we might minister effectively to one another, and even those outside of this assembly, outside of this church. We have the ability to do that effectively, and that will bring great reward for all eternity to those who join in that great ministry. So LORD, convict us where we need to be convicted and encourage us where we need to be encouraged, and build us up in the faith. We pray that this would be a joyful, instructive time of not just learning, but worship; may we worship You from the heart as we consider Your goodness to us.

We live and we move and we exist in You. And that's true of everyone and everything—but we in a special way. And we, as Your people are in Your hand, protected in a special way, kept for all eternity. We thank You for that; that's Your grace. May we understand that grace a little better because of our time together this morning. So we look to You to bless us, and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

*(Message)* There is an expression that's sometimes heard from college coaches or found on the pages of business books that gives us the point, (or at least the sense), of our passage: It is, "Grow or die." One of the mavens at Forbes had as the heading of his article: *"In Business You're Either Growing or You're Dying."* Coach Lou Holtz said, "In this world you're either growing or you're dying. So get in motion and grow!"

Well you might expect that from a motivational speaker. Paul wasn't that, but he did give counsel to Christians to be growing together in the church. And there's no alternative to spiritual growth; that's the counsel he gives in our passage in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 7-16. Previously, Paul's instruction was to, 'preserve the unity of the church.' But unity is not all; in unity with one another we need to grow from spiritual immaturity to maturity; and greater usefulness.

So now his instruction is to 'pursue growth'. But he gave it with more than a simple, 'So get in motion!', he gave specific directions. He informed us that, 'We have the means to do it; God has given gifts to us for that very purpose.' Remember, the Christian life is a supernatural life; it is of God. And God has equipped each of us so that we might help one another develop spiritually.

Churches that don't grow, (and I don't mean in size, but maturity), they do die. They become cold and lifeless—useless. That's a warning that's repeated to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

So Paul begins his instruction in verse 7 by informing the Ephesians that, 'God has blessed the church with gifts for service.' Service for Him, and service for one another; "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." (vs7). The grace Paul wrote of here is not 'saving grace', but 'enabling grace'. It refers to spiritual gifts. Now this isn't the word that Paul normally uses for "*gift*", but it's clear from the passage that that is his meaning.

A spiritual gift is not a natural talent or ability, but *supernatural* ability, and there are two things to notice. *First*, it is given "to each one". (vs7). Every Christian has been given a spiritual gift and equipped by Christ to serve God. *Secondly*, we don't all have the same gift; or the same number of gifts; or the same amount of gift. Gifts are given in different degrees according to Christ's sovereign will, "...according to the measure of Christ's gift." (vs7b). He measures it out; it's according to His will and His design. But we are all *gifted*—which is surprising for some Christians. Gifts are not limited to church leaders; they're given "to each one of us", as Paul says. And Paul explains that in the rest of the passage.

But first, in verse 8, he explained the origin of the gifts—how it is that Christ obtained them for us, (which Paul showed from Psalm 68, *a Psalm of David*). It is a prayer for deliverance; it's a prayer for salvation. It begins, "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered...". (Ps 68:1). Then David describes how God defeated Pharaoh and how He defeated the kings of Canaan.

And then Paul quoted verse 18 of the Psalm, here in verse 8,  
"Therefore it says,  
'When He ascended on high,  
He led captive a host of captives,  
And gave gifts to men.' "

And the Hebrew text actually has, "You have received gifts among men." (For a conqueror *received gifts* from the conquered in order to give the spoils of war, the spoils of victory, to his people—his army.)

Abraham did that after he defeated the four kings of the east, in Genesis 14. He kept nothing for himself, (he wouldn't let the king of Sodom boast that he'd made Abraham rich). So he had won this great victory but took nothing for himself. —But he did give gifts to his *retainers*, to those who fought with him—Aner, Eschol, and Mamre.

Paul saw a similarity between God's victory over Israel's enemies in Christ's triumphal return to heaven after His victory at Calvary over His enemies...Who are...? Well, as I said in the reading of the text, we don't have that defined but I would say, 'Over Satan, over sin and death', (I think Chrysostom interpreted it that way), but over "His enemies". (Ps 68:1). And now, enthroned at the Father's right hand, He has given the Holy Spirit to the church—and with Him, spiritual gifts to all of His people. Every one of you.

And that's how Paul applied the Psalm in verses 9 and 10: "Now this *expression*, 'He ascended', what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?... ", (vs9). In other words, 'The fact that Christ ascended into heaven

indicates that He previously descended from heaven into this world, through the incarnation, when He became a man.' Now ,it's at least that—and I think it is just that. I think that is what Paul means here; he's speaking of the incarnation.

Others, however, have seen more than that and have interpreted the statement, "into the lower parts of the earth", as either the grave or Hades. And each one of those interpretations has some justification.

So, I won't quarrel with that. But it was on the earth and on the cross that Christ won the victory through His death, when, by His obedience to the Father's will, He voluntarily offered Himself up as a sacrifice for His people—and gained them for Himself through that death. As a result God, "highly exalted Him", (Phl 2:9), raising Him up from earth, (and the humble state that He was in, the incarnation), to the highest glory, "...far above all the heavens...", where He is enthroned as King, "...filling all things." as Paul said. (vs10). That was the purpose of Christ's, 'ascension above the heavens', (ibid), that He might 'fulfill all things'.

Well, what does that mean? 'He fills the church'; Paul stated that back in chapter 1, verse 23—and it could have that idea; that may be his meaning here. But this is a different context; this is a cosmic context, so it's far broader than that. It means that He, as the triumphant and glorified God-man, now fills the universe with His presence and power.

Now, not in His humanity. His humanity is seated at the Father's right hand in heaven. But His deity fills it all—it fills it all as the victorious Savior of the world who redeemed His people; and because of His accomplishment at the cross will redeem and glorify the entire universe. He is all powerful. He is the Almighty, and has authority and the liberality out of that great power and authority to give gifts to His people.

He is King—He rules! And He gives us the spoils of victory, everything that He won at the cross!

They're listed, these "*gifts*", in verse 11. This is one of four lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament. The others are in Romans chapter 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Peter 4. So if you want to remember where the gifts are found in the New Testament, you remember two chapter numbers, chapter 12 and chapter 4.

There are over 20 gifts listed in all; but here in Ephesians only four are given. Verse 11, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers..." And you say, 'That's not four, that's five.' But I'm taking "pastors and teachers" as one gift, as I will explain shortly.

The first two, *apostles* and *prophets*, have been called, 'Foundational gifts', because in chapter 2, verse 20, Paul stated that the church is, "...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." The apostles were the authoritative founders of the church—and to carry out that mission they had special power to perform miracles.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of that in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12, where he recorded that, 'The signs of a true apostle were performed among them by signs, and wonders, and miracles.' Miracles were their credentials and they backed up the things that they said. In chapter 3, verse 5, (*Eph*), Paul stated that both, 'apostles and prophets gave the church God's revelation.' So they were essential for the church to have guidance and stability in those early years.

Neither of those gifts continued. They are called, "the foundation" of the church. A foundation is laid once—it's not laid continually. Everything's built upon that 'once for all foundation'. So neither of those have continued. When the Canon of Scripture was complete, when the New Testament was complete, prophets ceased; and when the church was established, apostles ceased.

One evidence of that is Acts chapter 1, verse 22, when a replacement for Judas was being chosen. It states that a requirement for being an apostle is that, 'He was a witness with the others', (the other apostles), "of His resurrection." In fact there, it is stated that, 'He must have been with the ministry', (or seen with the apostles), 'from the

very beginning; from the time of John the Baptist to the ascension of our Lord' Well, that pretty much rules out most people after the first generation.

But every apostle 'witnessed the resurrection', and in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 1, Paul affirmed his apostleship by writing, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" Well yes, he did; he saw Him in His resurrection glory on the Damascus road. So such witnesses were, obviously, necessarily restricted to that first generation of the church—and have not continued. They were *foundational*. The foundation of the church has been laid—and those gifts have ceased.

Now I know there are people today who claim to be 'prophets' and 'apostles'. That's nothing new. There have been people like that all through the history of the church. Martin Luther had to deal with those kinds of people more than once, (the Zwickau prophets and others). And they caused great mischief during the Reformation.

They occur all the time. But can a person who claims to be an apostle say, 'I've seen the resurrected Christ?' Well, they can say that—but did they? What did they see? Do they have witnesses? Were all the others there to witness it, the other apostles, to witness this? They'd say, 'Well, I saw Him like Paul did. Paul witnessed Him on the Damascus road, and he wasn't with the apostles from the beginning.'

And the response could be, 'Well, Paul had witnesses there. The company that was with him saw the light that Paul saw. They heard the voice; they didn't understand it, but they saw the phenomena that took place at his conversion there, when he was struck down and blinded on the road. They helped him back. Do you have people that have seen all of that?'

I suppose they could say 'yes'—and I suppose they've said yes to make their claim. But then you say, 'Okay. Well, what are the signs of an apostle? Have you done those? Have you given power so that the lame can walk? Peter did that at the gate called "Beautiful". (Acts 3:10). He gave Aeneas power to walk when he was on his way to Joppa where he raised Tabitha from the dead. Have you raised the dead? Paul did. Raised Eutychus. Let me see those miracles.' —I don't think people can produce that today.



Look, the Scriptures, I think, are clear that those gifts have ceased. What hasn't ceased, is this second group of gifts, continued in every generation of the church—that of evangelists, and pastors and teachers.

Evangelists are men who have a special ability to make the Gospel clear and relevant to unbelievers. Often they were the traveling missionaries in the early church. Philip was an evangelist. In Acts 8 it stated that, 'He took the Gospel up to Samaria', where there was a great revival. And then, interestingly, the Spirit of the LORD took him out of there, took him down to Gaza where, instead of preaching to multitudes of people and seeing mass conversions, he preached to one man—he preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, and he became a believer. Evangelism can happen anywhere—in church or outside.

In the 18th century the first Great Awakening began in the Anglican churches in England. When the crowds got too large, Whitefield moved into the open fields where thousands came to hear him. (Estimated size of the crowds were like 20,000 people at times.)

Evangelism can happen in the office, it can happen in the neighborhood. There are all kinds of ways and places to exercise the gifts. Timothy may or may not have been an evangelist, (that is, may, or may not, have had the gift of evangelism), but in 2 Timothy chapter 4, in verse 5, Paul urged him to "do the work of an evangelist". And I think we're all called upon to do that. Peter, in 1 Peter 3, verse 15 says, "...always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you..."

Well, you would hope that they see hope in us—that there's something different about our life, our demeanor, the conversation, and they say, 'What is in that person? What is their hope?' And then they ask you in one way or another, and you're able to give an answer—that's evangelism. But there are certain people, men and women, who have a special ability to give the Gospel with clarity and effectiveness—and to be God's soul winners.

Finally, Paul lists "pastors and teachers". That's really one gift, as I suggested earlier. It's two aspects of the same gift, the gift of 'pastor-teacher'. (I would write it out, 'pastor *hyphen* teacher'. The grammar indicates that.)

I hate to get into grammar, but it's necessary sometimes. In the Greek text, each *gift* has the definite article—the word, '*the*', (which isn't translated in the English text). But if it were it would translate, "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists." But there's only one article for both of these words, (*the pastor and teacher*), which would seem to join them together into one gift.

Also, the Greek word, '*and*', that is used to join the two words together is different from the conjunction, '*and*', that connects the other gifts. And so that word, '*and*', between the word 'pastor-teacher' is called 'a copulative *kai*'; it joins words together.

Charles Hodge stated that, "There's no evidence in Scripture that there was a set of men authorized to teach, but not authorized to exhort. One function includes the other."

That's what the pastor-teacher does; he explains the Scriptures—and on that basis, *exhorts*. He gives instruction and guidance. He differs from the evangelist in that his ministry is generally more localized in the church—and differs from the prophet, (who gives revelation), while the teacher explains the revelation.

Again, this is an abbreviated list. As mentioned earlier, there are two other major passages which list spiritual gifts, Romans 12, and 1 Corinthians 12. And there are various ways to classify the gifts; but in 1 Peter 4, Peter seems to classify them into two groups—speaking gifts, and service gifts. He wrote, "Whoever speaks, let him speak as it were the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so by the strength which God supplies." (vs10-11). In other words, 'Serve by the grace of God.' He is giving us a constant supply to do it. —It's Supernatural.

Well, 'speaking gifts' would include the gifts of teaching and evangelism, but also the gift of *exhortation*, which is listed in Romans 12, verse 8, and is a gift that gives wise counsel to people, and guidance to people—and does so in a way that urges them to follow the wise way.

'Service gifts' would include the gift of *helps* and a gift that's called *service*. I think that's doing work behind the scenes. The gift of *giving* is another—using one's finances to support the ministry. The gift of *mercy* is obviously one of those service gifts—caring for the sick, the disabled, and the grieving.

Really, in fact, all spiritual gifts are service gifts—but there are certain ones that are sort of behind the scenes and give physical/material, as well as spiritual help to people. They are given, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12, verse 7, "for the common good." —a very important principle to remember. No gift has been given for personal edification; all of them have been given for edifying the church. They 'go out' from us; and that's how we're to use them.

And there are many others. As I said, over 20, and each of us has been given at least one, maybe more—but at least one. Verse 7, "To each one of us grace was given..."

What an amazing thing! I don't want to take up too much time, and this is 'off script', but the church is a brand new society; 'some from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.' There is "in Christ" no longer Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free...But there are all of those type people in the church; it doesn't mean that was all wiped away.

There were slaves in the Church. Onesimus was a slave; and probably the church met in his master's house, Philemon. And just think of this: He was gifted! And I suspect he was gifted with *teaching*. So here, this slave, sits down in his master's house and then he stands up and teaches his master—and his master listens to him...and takes notes! It obliterated these terrible distinctions, (not all were terrible distinctions, but that particular distinction), and I think it had an effect on removing slavery to some extent.

But that's the new society that God's grace creates. And all of us have been gifted. It's a gift of God. It's not of us, it's His work; and so, verse 7, "To each one of us grace was given."

But Paul was not concerned here to give a complete list of all of the gifts. He gives the four that were fundamental to the growth of the church—those that convey revelation and explain biblical instruction. This is the principle means of building up the church—which is the lesson that he's giving here; it's restricted to that. There's nothing more necessary for spiritual growth than teaching; explaining the Word of God.

And that's what Paul indicates in verse 12, where he states the reason God gave these teaching gifts to the church. They are not an end in themselves—but a means to the end. It was, "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;" (vs12). Now that's an important verse for understanding the church and its ministry because it shows that ministry is not the work of one man—'the pastor', or an elite group, 'the clergy'—but rather it involves all of the church...every one of you.

John Stott has some good words on this. He explained the traditional notion of the church, "As modeled after a pyramid, with one man, the pastor, perched", he said, "precariously on the pinnacle, like a little 'Pope', in his own church—while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority." I like that. He said, "That's an unbiblical image; as is, 'The model of a bus in which the pastor does all the driving,' while the congregation are passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him."

The New Testament doesn't support the idea of a single pastor. I know it's common vocabulary in a church to talk about 'The Pastor.' 'The pastor', is not an office; there's no mention of 'the office of pastor'. It's a *'gift'*, as mentioned here in our text. And he is not some kind of 'CEO of the church' that is sometimes given as an analogy today to a passive, slumbering congregation. Neither one of those ideas is biblical.

The Bible teaches a plurality of leadership and oversight; with the involvement of all the saints using their gifts—what Mr. Stott called, "an every member ministry." And to illustrate that clearly, Paul's model for the church is a human body: A body made up of many parts with different functions—but parts that all work together in harmony and unity. It's what a healthy body does, and that's characteristic of it.

Paul calls the church, "the body of Christ", (vs12), because Christ's physical body has "ascended far above all the heavens", (vs10), in glory—it's not here. So we are His representatives on earth; He is our 'head' in heaven, and we are 'His body' on earth. A body is one thing—with many parts. It has unity and diversity—and each part has a necessary function. There is no insignificant part of the human body—and no insignificant saint in the church. We all have our function; we've all been gifted to serve the body of Christ.

And *evangelists* and *teachers* have been given to the church so that each member will be adequately equipped to do that service. That word, "*equipping*", or, "*the equipping of the saints*", (vs12), is used in the Gospels for the fishermen, (the disciples), mending their fishing nets, *fixing* their nets. It was also a medical term used at that time, in the '*setting*' of a broken bone. So the idea is that of, 'fixing flaws in the saints'—strengthening character, making a person useful in his or her life and "in serving the Lord." (Acts 20:19).

Now, Biblical instruction is necessary for that; it's necessary, it's essential for sanctification, for spiritual growth. John Stott wrote, "Nothing is more necessary for the building up of God's church in every age than an ample supply of God-gifted teachers; — and you need more than one." I think he's right. They are not the end—but the means, or agents to the end...which isn't just to have a knowledgeable congregation only...(you need to have a knowledgeable congregation, but that's not the end of it; that's not the whole goal of it)...but having saints 'fit for service' so that we can, "get in motion and grow", to quote Coach 'Lou'. If we're not growing, we're shrinking...if not dying. So it's

necessary that we be nourished, that we be fed spiritually, 'equipped for every work of service.'

The inevitable result of that is *maturity* and *unity*. That's how Paul puts it in verse 13. We need instruction for equipping, "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Unity and maturity go together. We reach maturity as a church through unity—which we achieve through mutual concern for one another and ministry to one another.

And Paul shows the importance of that in the final verses: Without maturity we're like naïve children—undiscerning, unstable, and easily influenced. That's not a criticism of children; naivety is part of being a child—they are impressionable, susceptible to fads and fashion, always wanting the new, shiny thing. It's where we all begin. All of us have been there—that's where we begin. But we are to be progressing; we are to be growing out of childhood into adulthood. "When we aren't, the problem isn't", as Leon Morris put it, "that we are childlike, but that we become childish."

And Christians can become childish in spiritual matters. I've seen it; you've probably seen it. They can be mature in regard to their career, and in regard to some wisdom, worldly type wisdom, (which I'm not disputing or discounting), but they can be that in terms of their career. So they can understand finance and they can understand medicine—but be completely naïve about God; about His purpose, about His will, and about His plan for the ages.

Paul described this immaturity as, "being carried about by every wind of doctrine", (vs14b),—intrigued by spiritual fads; interested in 'the apostles of today'—or something like that. Vulnerable to wolves and continually pulled off course—off what Jeremiah called "the ancient paths".

The mature Christian, on the other hand, is steady and discerning. He or she has knowledge and understanding of the truth, and knows how to use it in the church and to

help others develop. Paul encouraged that in verse 15. He said, Instead of 'being carried about by every wind of doctrine', he says, "...but speaking the truth in love..." That is a 'disjunctive', that word, "but"; it makes a contrast indicating another course from that of being enticed by foolish ideas. Rather than being "carried about", we are to be people who are "speaking the truth in love". Literally, it's something like, "truthing in love", because this Greek verb is connected to the word 'truth', and includes, I think, both action and speech. So the meaning might be broader than *speaking*, and include action—the idea of both speaking and living the truth. It's as we show and tell the truth, in love, that the Holy Spirit changes people, (changes us and the Christians that we serve), to give growth and bring the church to maturity—to make us like Christ. We, as a church as a whole, need to grow. We do that individually, of course, but we're joined together; and as we mature and minister to one another the whole church matures and grows.

What an interesting place our church is located in, (on a side street that most people just drive by). But here, we've got the Orthodox Jews in their synagogue to the west; and to the south the Mormon Temple. What an interesting place to be. We should be a light in this community.

Well, we can't be a light if we're not a mature church and we need to be growing—and that light needs to be seen. That will happen as we do what Paul is saying here. So, minister to one another—and that gives growth to each individual, which gives growth to the church and makes us like Christ.

Paul wrote that, "...we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, into Christ, who is the head, even Christ." (vs15b). So again, Paul was using the image of a human body to describe the church. It's living and growing. And here he said, 'It is growing up into the head.' Now that's a difficult picture to imagine, but as commentators have pointed out, a baby's head is larger in proportion to its body than the head of a grown up to his or her body. So the idea of growing up here means, 'Bringing the body into the right

proportion with the Head.' And the church is to be doing that, growing into the right proportion to Christ: Developing, maturing, becoming like Him by growing.

Now in verse 16 Paul wrote that the growth is from Christ, 'from whom the whole body is being fitted and held together.' That is a *present tense* indicating, 'an ongoing process'. He's always supplying us with growth producing life. It's His life in us by virtue of our union with Him. Being "in Him"—that very important expression that we find throughout the Book of Ephesians and throughout Paul's literature. "In Him", in a vital relationship and union with Him, we are joined to the second Person of the Trinity, (meaning we're joined to the Trinity), and we have the life of God within us—and He supplies us so that we can do these things.

But this growth occurs, not only because we're in Christ, but because we're joined together. It occurs through our union with the saints as well as our union with Christ. We are described as joints that are "fitted together". We are, "...what every joint supplies...", Paul said. (vs16b). And because we are all connected, like parts of a body, Christ works through us, supplying us with His grace as we use our gifts and serve one another with mutual assistance. That's how the church functions.

One great example of that, (at least to my mind it is), is the love and care that John Newton gave to his friend William Cowper. Now think of this, John Newton was a cruel man. —He was a slave trader when God arrested him, like he did Paul on the Damascus road, and changed him into a man of grace who loved the weakest of the saints. And that's what William Cowper was. He was a brilliant poet, a hymn writer, but a weak and trouble soul—a suicidal person.

But Newton, who lived near him and was his pastor-teacher in the town of Olney, spent time with him. They would go on walks together, almost every day, and talk. And Newton encouraged him to write hymns, (and Cowper has given us some of the great hymns that we have). Even after Newton moved to a church in London, he wrote to Cowper regularly, always 'speaking the truth to him in love.' The church needs people



who will do that very thing because that is how the Lord equips us, heals and strengthens us. —It's with the truth.

Now the application of all of this to us is obvious, isn't it? You have a gift, maybe have more than one. Do you know what that gift is? Are you using it to build up the saints? The Lord's design for the church is, 'an every member ministry'. We've all been equipped to do it.

Maybe your gift is *hospitality*. That's mentioned in Romans chapter 12, verse 13. If you're one of those who is happy to meet people, and greet them, then use your gift to speak to a stranger here in the service, and be an example of that to us, (...and don't be surprised if that stranger's been here for 20 years! *[Laughter]*.) We've all had that experience, but nevertheless, it's a great act and a warm thing to do. And it's warm and welcoming—and that's who Christ is. He is a warm and welcoming Savior; He didn't turn people away.

Well maybe your gift is *exhortation*. That's in Romans 12 verse 8. Use this gift to exhort us to be obedient to our ministry. "Consider", as the author of Hebrews said, (Heb 10:24), "how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds."

We will do that as we grow together in Christ; united in love for Him which generates love for one another and a desire to do *what lasts for all eternity*. Let me say that again: "*What lasts for all eternity!*" —The work of service is something that has *eternal reward*. May God help us to engage in that.

Let me conclude with the gift of evangelism—or the work of an evangelist and invite any who may be here without Christ, who have not believed in Him—to come to Him. Know that you are lost, but you may be found through faith in Christ. He's done the work of salvation and invites sinners to recognize their need to be reconciled to God, to make peace with God. You do that by *turning* from unbelief, to trust in Christ, whose death paid for the sinner's sins. All who trust in Him are forgiven—and at that moment they are received into God's family, and equipped for ministry.

And to the rest of us: May we all, by God's grace, be growing up *into Christ*.

*(Closing prayer)* Father, we are debtors to mercy alone. But by Your sovereign grace we've been saved; and we give You thanks and praise for that.

The LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen

*(End of Audio)*