

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed:
The Book of Ephesians

PART

14

TITLE

Build Up In Love

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:7-16



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It is so great to see you Providence, always a joy to worship with you, sing to the King. It's so good to see your faces today. If you're a guest here with us, welcome. We are really glad that you have joined us as well. We love the Bible here at Providence. If you're a guest, we love the Bible because the Bible points to Christ who has saved us from our sin. We love to walk through it verse by verse. Right now we're in a study of an amazing little book, it's called Ephesians and we're up to chapter four. If you want to head there if you have one with you. If you don't have one there's lots of Bibles in chairs near you and if you don't have a Bible at home please take that home as a gift. This is an absolutely critical passage for us as a church family, not only for us to believe but for us to have enough courage to actually practice it in our life and for us to believe it and for us to have courage we need God's help. I want to pray for us even as we get started so if you would, let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank You for Your grace in our life. I thank You for every single person who is here, every life that is represented here today. Every life has been created in Your image to know You and You have knit us in the womb wonderfully. You have done amazing things and we confess it, we believe it and we see it. Yet we look at our own life and we look at our church family and we look around the world and there are so many people who struggle to believe in Christ because of the inconsistencies that they see in those who are called Christians. We pray for us as a church family that You would help us to grow, that You would help our lives to be a winsome example of the validity of the Gospel. That our lives though imperfect, they would persistently point to the grace and mercy and love of Christ.

We pray for those who do not know You today, maybe even who are in this room or maybe at home watching in. I pray Father that You would show them, convince them by Your Spirit of the supremacy of Jesus. How consequential His promises and His accomplishments are for us who believe. I pray Father that You would speak through weakness and that You would glorify Your Son Jesus as we look at this amazing passage. Thank You for it. We need Your help and we pray this in Christ name. Amen.

Well many of us who are here today probably no somebody in this world who really does struggle to believe in Christ or to become a Christian because of the inconsistency or the lack of love or the abuse or the great hypocrisy that they see or have seen in the lives of either a believer or a church or maybe even a pastor. This week I read a brief article, it was online, and it was called "What People Don't Know About their Pastor". It was really not super fresh in its ideas. There are things that I was certainly familiar with. I've known and seen of a lot of pastors friends that they're true. Things like your pastor works more than Sundays or often times their wife is incredibly lonely because they care about everyone else's needs but their own wife or that their kids feel like they're in a fish bowl. Things that you have probably heard or known or see. As I kind of read through I thought it was interesting but it was an online article and most online articles they have a place at the end where all the readers can add a comment, can write anything they want to and post it to the article. You've seen these.

The fact is that that was the most piercing part of reading people condemn Christianity outright because of the inconsistency that they had seen in a pastor or a church. Paul knew that this was reality even from when he's writing in a prison he knows that the lives of believers, they form that picture frame through which the world looks through us, through that broken piece of glass in order to see the Gospel, how valid it is, how credible it is, how trustworthy it is. That if those who believe in it believe it and hold fast to it and their lives are no different from the world then how powerful can this Gospel actually be? Paul knowing that this is true he spends three chapters, the first three chapters of Ephesians, seeking to describe the power of the Gospel that's available to us to change our life that you and that we can live a different kind of life.

Then he makes a transition in chapter four verse one. He makes an appeal and he says I urge you, I appeal to you to live in a manner worthy of the calling with which you've been called. What we looked at last week was the first few verses, verses one through six, about the importance of unity within the church family. That if there is one faith and one Lord and one Christ and one church and one baptism and one way then how can we be two and still represent Christ? Still represent the Gospel? The entire lesson last time was just on the importance of unity within the body of Christ, within our relationships. What we find in the passage starting in verse seven to verse 16 is we see the importance of maturity in the body of Christ and how it is a manner in which we live worthy of the Gospel.

Let's read it here starting in verse seven he says, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ gift. Therefore it says: 'When He ascended on high, He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men.' In saying He ascended what does it mean but that He also descended into the lower region of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. He gave the apostles and the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ 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. Rather, speaking the truth in love we're to grow up in every way into Him who is the head into Christ 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."

Even from a Roman prison cell the apostle Paul cares deeply, he is burdened deeply about the growth of this local church or these local churches in Ephesus. He's concerned about their growth. You see he knew that they were just getting started in their walk with Christ. They were new believers, many of them and they were seeking to work out some of the most basic issues of how does Christ intervene now and intersect with my life of how I am used to living all of my life? Much like this picture, I think this is how Paul sees these churches in Ephesus. That they're a little bit weak, they're flimsy, they're just getting started. Though they certainly have aspirations. They have a book and it has pictures and it has the portrait of a mature man, Jesus Christ.

They're aspiring to this but at the present time it only takes a really, really small breeze in order to knock them over spiritually and invalidate in the eyes of people who were looking at them the validity of the Gospel.

He's passionate about this and he's passionate about our life and our maturity as a church family as well. What he does in this passage is he shows us what Christ makes available to us, what He literally has given to us those of us who have believed in Christ to change our life. Before I show you what Christ has given to us I want to show you what Christ wants from us. There are several purpose statements of his activity in the text and I just want to show them to you even before we look at what He's doing. Let's look at why He's doing it.

Look at verse 14, I'm sorry verse 10. We started in verse seven and it says that Christ is giving gifts, that He's giving grace. Christ ascended He descended and then He tells us why and He says that. You see at the end of verse 10? He says that He might fill all things. The word that means in order that. In other words, Christ is doing verse seven, eight, nine and the first part of verse 10 and He tells us exactly what He wants to do in our life and that is that He sees us as empty cups that He wants to fill up. He sees us empty in strength or grace or love and He wants to fill that grace and strength up. He wants to fill what is lacking. It's one of the reasons of why He has given us all of these amazing things.

He keeps going, look at verse 12. Actually in verse 11 he says that He gives us, all these leaders, and then He tells us why. He says to equip the saints for the work of ministry and then He tells us why. Why? For or because for building up the body of Christ. He sees a weakling with very little muscles in the body of Christ and he says I want to see this church family grow strong and mature. Then he tells how long he wants to do this and he says until and three things he talks about, he says until we as a church family become unified in our faith and knowledge of who He is and then He says until that you and I become a mature man. Then third he says to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Here's what Paul, from prison, he's thinking he sees Jesus Christ, the perfection of everything the world wants and he says but the people aren't looking at Christ now, they're looking at Christians.

Christ is in heaven where He's ascended so they're looking through our life. What he's praying is this, is that you have Christ in all of His fullness. He says so here's Jesus and then there's all the fullness of Jesus and then there's the stature of the fullness of Jesus and then there's just a measure of the stature. He's saying I'm just praying that God is going to work in your life and He's working in your life until this happens, until you reach just a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In other words, that He's going to be doing this until we give an accurate reflection in our lives of His supremacy and His wisdom and His love. This is what Jesus wants from us.

He goes on a step further in verse 14 He says so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. What he looks at here is a piece of foam board in the ocean waves, it just gets tossed back and forth. Every new idea in the culture people who are immature they just believe that and then all of a sudden there's a new wave, there's a new wind and we blow over here and now all of a sudden we're over here. He says no, Christ is working in our lives. He's going to do very specific things so that you and I are no longer blown around and tossed to and fro as if we're a piece of foam in the ocean.

He says two more things. In verse 15 he says I want you to speak the truth in love and he goes why? In order or to grow up in every way. Then at the very end he says so that it or the body builds itself up in love. What I hope that you see here is this, is that Christ is very passionate about you and I growing mature. Not only as individuals but as a church family. Now we need to ask this question and answer it is. What does this text say Christ has already given us and is giving us in order to bring about this kind of winsome maturity in our life? What are the things that He's doing?

The first thing that He's doing is Christ has given us spiritual gifts to help His body grow. This is one of the tools, this is one of the things He's already given us in Christ. He says in verse seven he says, but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ gift. In other words, though you and I we form one body with one Savior and one Lord and one faith and one Father each and every one of us individually being gifted by Christ with unique differing spiritual gifts. Then he tells us why later is that so that the body will grow up.

Now to show us how Christ does this gifting in our life he actually points back to Psalm 68 and if you notice there in verse eight it says therefore it says, what he does is he literally quotes one verse out of Psalm 68 and it's verse 18 and it says, "When He ascended on high He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men." Then he talks about Him ascending and descending. He said the One who descended eventually He ascended right? Then it says He gave gifts to men. Now what does all this descending and ascending? He's certainly talking about Jesus Christ and this is the picture of what he's saying. He says that when you and I we sinned against God and broke fellowship Jesus was in heaven ascended. He was sitting on a throne receiving the unending adoration and worship of all the redeemed, of all the angels in heaven. Perfection of worship.

It says that He rose, He took off His kingly garments and it says He descended to the earth. He descended by taking on a human body. Think about the condescension of the Creator becoming like one of us. He descended by taking on a frail human body, He descended by taking on sin, He descended by dying for all of that sin and then He descended into the depths by being buried in a grave. The Bible says He doesn't stay there. It says that He rose from the dead and when He rose from the dead He ascended. Then it says that He ascended up back into heaven where now He makes intercession for those of us who believe. He's praying for us.

Now this picture is actually one that would often be seen in Rome. You see when a general would come back from war victorious there would be a big parade and all the people would gather on the side and they would celebrate the victorious general and the army who had come back from war. The difference in this picture and what happened actually with Jesus Christ was there was no army. There was just the general. All the believers, that's you and I, we stand on the side and we see Jesus Christ coming back and we're worshipping and adoring Him for His accomplishments of what only He could do. There was no army with Him. There was no help. It was Jesus alone. Yet the picture is this, is unlike a human general that just heaped up the praise for himself, just enjoyed all the adoration and all the gifts of all the people who would be admiring him as he and his army came into town. What it says is what Jesus does is He sits on top of His spoils of war in great big wagons and as He comes through center town and all the believers on each side of Him it says that He's heaping up handfuls of the spoils of war and He's throwing them to us as gifts.

In other words, all of His accomplishments He's seeking to share with us. He's heaping on us and it says that Jesus Christ when He rose from the dead and He defeated sin and Satan and death that for everyone who believed on Him, not only would they be forgiven of their sin and be made righteous but it says that He would literally give one of His gifts, His gifts, to each and every one of us who believe. He does this so that the body may grow. Each has been given, it says, according to the measure of Christ gift. If you're a Christian here today you need to understand Jesus Christ has given you something particular and He intends it to be used so that His body will grow. This is how we know, 1 Peter chapter four verses 10 and 11 says this, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies-in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."

Lets utilize our gifts to serve the body. I actually chose the word utilize instead of use because use means we just expend them but utilize them actually means make effective use of them. In other words, you have been specifically designed to be able to do a specific thing for the good of the body of Christ so that the body can grow. I want to encourage you to utilize, to make effective use of that gift. You see using our gifts to serve is sort of like going to the gym. First of all it's hard. It's one thing you need to know is sometimes serving the body of Christ is not easy, it's hard. It takes energy, it takes sacrifice. Sometimes you bleed or sweat, you crying because of sorrow. It's hard. Sometimes it's really hard.

Second thing about serving is similar to the gym is after a week it's not really all that shiny. Alright. There's a big stop button in front of you and any time you want you just slam the stop button and say enough of this, and a lot of people do that. It's not all that shiny after a period of time. There's wonderful benefits to come but sometimes we simply can't see them. That's a third thing is sometimes it's really hard to see progress. Some of us serve and serve and serve. Some of us are life teachers or leaders and we engage and we pray and we seek and we teach and we teach and we teach and we don't see growth.

Think am I making any difference whatsoever? Sometimes you go to the gym and you feel the same thing. You know in the gym looking in the mirror like nothing has changed. Sometimes it's very similar to serving within the body.

The fourth that's true is that when you serve the body it's similar to the gym is that people will critique your form. They will. They'll let you know what you they think about how well you're doing. Good or bad. Right form, wrong form. Right time, wrong time. That's not really intended to be a criticism of the body, I'm just telling you that if you're going to utilize your gift you need to expect people to critique your form. If you can't accept that you're going to quit serving, you're going to hit that big red button on that treadmill all the time. Just happens. Sometimes for good reasons because we have the encouragement of other brothers and sisters in our life and sometimes because we're all broken.

You know what's interesting is that when we exercise our gifts we and the body, it grows. Our faith and love and wisdom and courage they grow. This growth is winsome to outsiders and since we're connected to the body and using these gifts to serve the body the body also grows. My question is this, how are your gifts being utilized to serve the body of Jesus Christ? If you are here and I have all these gifts or I have a gift I would love to serve, I don't know how or where. Literally at the end of our time someone's going to come, Phil, he's going to invite you to go back to next steps to think about either you trusting Christ or finding a life group. You can also go back there and you can talk to somebody about where in this church is there a need for someone with my gifts. We'd love to help you find that place.

Wherever that place is I want to urge you to seek the good of the church by using your gifts and the primary reason is because Jesus Christ has literally stapled, attached His glory to the local church. She's not a perfect place, she never will be this side of heaven. Instead of evaluating your investment on the basis of her lack of perfection what if God simply wanted you to help her take one little step forward in the area of your giftedness? Let's utilize our gifts for the good.

The second thing we see that Christ has given is He's given us shepherds to help His body grow. He's literally given leaders, people, other people in our life. Look what He says in verse 11, And He Jesus gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and the teachers, the leaders. Why did He do this? To equip the saints, that's us, for the work of ministry. Why? For building up the body of Christ. How long? Until we reach unity and mature manhood and in measure the stature of the fullness of Christ. The word equip is also used in other places of the New Testament and it's translated just a little bit different. Every time you can see those little differences you get a fuller perspective of what this word may mean. You look at Matthew chapter four verse twenty one and there Jesus is walking and He looks and it says going on from there He saw two other brothers and it says this was James and John and they were mending their nets. The word mending there is the same Greek word for equipping in Ephesians chapter four.

In other words part of the equipping role of leaders in your life is to mend what is torn. It's to fix what is broken. We also see another portrait of this word equip it means to supply what's lacking. 1 Thessalonians chapter there verse ten says we desire to supply, and that word supply is the same word equip, what is lacking in your faith. In other words, each and every one of us have been gifted by a victorious Jesus Christ yet not so perfectly that we are not in end of the fixing and supplying of others. We need others. We need shepherds to feed us and encourage us and correct us. You see you and I, one of my favorite pictures in nature that resembles how God created the church is a forest of redwood trees. You can see one here. These amazing amazing trees that God created. They are so wide and they are so tall and yet what's interesting about a redwood tree is that their root system is disproportionately small in comparison to the size of the tree. Their roots are actually pretty shallow and that's why you'd hardly and never see redwoods in isolation. You always seem them grouped together and the reason is because God created those roots not to go necessarily down deep but out wide. When they go out wide they intertwine with the root system of other redwood trees.

When there's a storm and a great wind and one tree wants to give way all the rest of the trees they're holding on. This is the portrait you see within the local body is that God is literally given us leaders within the church that when the winds of ideas or when the winds of temptation come is that there's people in our life who love us enough to correct us and encourage us and exhort us, pray for us, be with us. We need the church and the church needs us. You see as we are equipped to utilize our gifts and then we utilize our gifts for the good of the church the whole body of Christ grows. What's the application for this one? It's this, let's receive Christ's gift of godly leadership.

Now some of you are sitting here thinking well I simply don't trust pastors. I've known one before and was in a church and this is what happened. The fact is it's absolutely fair. It's not entirely fair but it's fair because there have been more than a handful of people that have disqualified themselves and broken the trust of people and now everybody else who follows in their occupation or their title is judged on the same criteria of that persons lack of faith and pastors. That's why the point was to receive Christ gift of Godly leadership. I do believe that you need to find a church family where your pastors are Godly. When they mess up, they confess their sin. They're seeking to be Godly, they're seeking to be humble. If you have struggle with pastors, well the fact is there's a lot of evidence of why you should. There's also evidence in the Bible that says that Jesus Christ gives us a gift, this is supposed to be a benefit to us to have leaders in our life who feed us and shepherd us.

Some of you may also be thinking well really this whole application is really convenient to you because you're the pastor. Alright. What about you? What about the rest of the pastors? Let me just talk about me. I confess readily that I too am in need of the mending and supplying and accountability of other people which is why I am under submit myself under the elders and why the elders submit and are under you, the church family. It's also why I routinely listen to the other pastors at Providence preach because I too want to be fed and encouraged.

It's also why that I listen, receive the feedback as well as the ministry of the body of Christ. You see one of the things that's true is this, is that pastors must never forget that they still are one of the sheep and yet we should also remember that it is Christ who called some people to lead, not because they're more special or not because necessarily they're more Godly, not because they have some sanctimonious halo over their head but because Christ said the church is need of this.

He's entrusted them to the church and it's supposed to be for the good of the church. I would simply encourage you as you see this here is to receive their ministry over your life. As they follow Christ, follow them. As they pray for you, pray for them. Don't disconnect from the body and become like a piece of driftwood which at one time was connected to the body and at one time was bearing all kinds of wonderful fruit in their life. Don't disconnect. Let's be redwoods that stand together and grow together for the glory of Jesus.

The last thing I want you to see that Christ has given is He's given us a ministry to help His body grow. This is what you find in verses 15 through 17. I want you to notice this, He says, though our gifts differ widely. You can look through here and there's some people in this room who's gift is administration, for others it's leadership and for others it's teaching or exhortation or mercy or helping or service. There's all kinds of wonderful gifts that God has given the church and yet God has given all of us the same ministry, meaning that gift it has a point but it's also directed somewhere. This is where I believe that gift is directed. Whatever your gift is He's called us all to speak the truth in love. Why? So that we grow up in every way into Him who is the head into Christ.

Every single one of us need truth. You see truth is the skeletal structure of the Christian. People who exist in cults can thrive in a vacuum of truth, but people in Christianity cannot. Christians need truth. Without the skeletal structure of truth in our life literally we crumble to the ground and we malign the Savior who has called us with such an amazing calling. God called all of us to speak the truth and to speak it in love. Hebrews chapter three verse thirteen gives us a portrait of what this looks like. He says, but encourage one another daily as long as it is called today so that none of you may be hardened by sins deceitfulness. What he's saying here is this is that sin is powerful because of the promises that it makes and yet sin is a liar. It promises you the world and it gives you a cracker.

God tells us to fight sin by locking arms with other truth telling truth reminding believers, friends who are connected to other people that say I understand what sin is telling you right now but God has a superior promise that I want to tell you. I want to remind you what God has said in this moment. Providence, let's remind each other of God's superior promises. Let's remind each other of God's superior promises. What I want you to know is that nobody here grows past this need. You will not grow in Christ so mature that the most ... That the least mature person at Christ ... At Providence who's in Christ cannot encourage and remind. If you ever get to the place to where the reminder did you know that Jesus loves you? If you're too mature to be encouraged by that it actually means that we're not mature at all.

Every single one of us can encourage someone in this body if you know something that's true you can tell it to someone. You can tell it to me, I can tell it to you. We need each other. You see when you and I are afraid to obey God we need a friend in our life who reminds us of Joshua one five and six that says, God says, I will not leave you or forsake you so be strong and courageous. When you and I, when we're saddled with guilt and we're struggling to receive and practice God's forgiveness in our life we all need a friend or two that can remind us of God's promise in 1 John 1:9 that says if we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When you and I are tempted to sin, when sin looks so luring and so pleasant and so peaceful we need friends in our life who can remind us of passages like first Peter chapter two verse eleven. This should be first Peter not second. It says I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires, this is why, because they wage war against your soul.

Sin is telling you that this is going to be such a pleasant day when you walk down that path, but you're actually warring against your soul. You need a friend in your life who can remind you of that. Where are these friendships built? Where does all this ministry of truth telling in love? Where does it take place? He says at the joints. At the joints. That's what he says in verse 15. It says it all happens at the joints, actually verse 16. The joints are those intersections of relationships where you and I are the body of Christ and where we connect and where we meet one another and where we spend time with each other. All of a sudden that provides us opportunities to see each other and to encourage each other.

You see friends, I want you to listen to this very very carefully though. I promise you I'm almost done. I got literally one paragraph left. That should be encouraging, right? One paragraph. Ever since Adam and Eve were in the garden and were hiding behind bushes because they sinned against God and were ashamed, they learned themselves that they were now naked. They brought shame all over their life. Ever since people have been hiding in the bushes people have settled for terminally casual friendships in an attempt to cover their shame. We have become experts at giving non answers, at keeping people at arms length, managing peoples perceptions and social media has provided the perfect platform for this. It allows us to give the perception that we live this riveting life while hiding all the trash and counting followers as friends.

I want you to know that this is not the plan that God has for you. Heaven will not be this shallow and because of Jesus Christ earth does not have to be either. You see at Providence the primary intersection of relationships is a small group. A small group, here at Providence we call those life groups. It can also take place while you're serving with other people. It can actually take place on a mission trip where you're connected to one another, where you're able to minister to one another. My appeal today is simply this, for those of you who are not connected to this body to connect to a small group of some kind, a life group. Preferably if you're serving with those people that you're serving with. Then second is my appeal is to those in those groups already especially the leaders of those groups is to make room for God's provision in that group for the body to be ministering to the body so that it can build itself up in love.

If your small group resembles this group where everything is flowing from the front to the back those people in your group including yourself are not receiving all that God wants them to have and all that you need them to have. There has to be a moment in time where it doesn't just come from the expert up front but literally where every part of the body is able to minister and to encourage and to edify and build up each other because if people do not have that opportunity not only does the body go missing, all the benefits from the wisdom and skills that they can't grow up either because all they're simply doing is receiving. We grow by serving and so at Providence both have to be had and I want encourage you if you're a leader to pursue that.

Before I close let me speak real quickly to those who have never trusted Christ. If your hesitancy in trusting Him is due to inconsistency in the lives of Christians then we as believers we apologize. Are sorry for the distorted reflection. My appeal is simply this, is that we are growing but we're clearly not that so look to Jesus who's already there. Look to the one who lived the blameless life, who died for your sin, who rose from the dead. We urge you to trust Him today. Okay? Let's pray together.

Father in heaven we thank You. We thank You so much for grace in our life. We thank You for what You've made available to us in Jesus for us to be able to grow. God we pray that You would give us humility in our hearts that You would help us Lord to not only seek to want to practice the gift that You have given us but You would also help us Lord to receive from others the gifts that You have given to them. Help us not to isolate even though at times it feels so appealing. God would You help us to speak the truth in love not only in casual conversations but in intentional conversations but God even now as we sing. As we sing to You Father it's an opportunity for us to be able to speak the truth in love to other people. God we look to You. We need You, we need Your help. We pray God that as we give and as we sing God that You would take the worshiped that You would honor Jesus Christ and that His name would go far and wide to the ends of the earth. We pray in Christ name. Amen.



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