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SPEAKER

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Grace Unleashed:
The Book of Ephesians

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14

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Build Up In Love

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Ephesians 4:7-16



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Well, Good morning, Providence. Man, it is a joy to be with you guys today. It is an honor to gather every week and to lift our voices and praise to the one that has saved us. If you're a guest with us today, then it is really an honor that you've joined us. This morning, we're going to be continuing our journey through the Book of Ephesians. Today, we're going to be in chapter 4 of Ephesians. We're going to pick up starting with verse 7. If you don't have a bible, if you'll look in front of you under the chair directly in front of you or to your right or left, there should be a bible in one of those seats under the seat. If you don't have a bible, consider that our gift to you. We love the word of God here because it points us to the one who saved us, the one who did the remarkable work of salvation and gave Himself for us on the cross. We're going to pick up with His word today in Ephesians.

Now, last week, Brian and Dave walked us through the first part of chapter 4. Paul tells us in the beginning of chapter 4 that God's grace motivates us to pursue unity. We spent a lot of time last week talking about what a unified people look like, and we spent a ton of time as we've walked through Ephesians talking about that. Today, we're going to see that God's grace motivates us to pursue maturity. "... to walk worthy," as Paul says at the beginning of chapter 4, "... to walk worthy of the calling to which we've been called," means we'll grow, we'll mature, that we'll become something. As we move through this life together, that we'll become something specific. Let's read God's word starting with verse 7. Paul writes, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts. Therefore, it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men.'

"Now in saying He ascended, what does it mean but that He also descended into the lower regions of the earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave the apostles and the prophets, the evangelists and shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain the 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 ways and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him, who is the head, Jesus 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."

Let's pray. Father, in these few moments that we have, would you give us the grace to see the miraculous work that You've wrought in our hearts when you've given us salvation, but that you didn't stop there, that you set us on a track, and your goal was the maturity of our faith and that you give us one another to move us toward that goal as individuals, but also as your church, as your body? God, may we be challenged by what we hear. Also, may we be amazed.

You're a good God, who lavishes us with great gifts, and most important of which is simply the reconciling of ourselves to You through the shed blood of Jesus. It is in His name that we pray these things. Amen. I want to start this morning by asking you guys a question. Why are you here? Why are you here? Why did you come? Why did you make an effort to get up this morning and endure our second winter?

We had spring earlier this week, and now we're back into winter, but why did you get out of your house and come? If you're joining us here on this campus or if you're joining us by livestream, what prompted you to turn your computer on and to login and to listen to the word of God, to join together in lifting our voices and praise and to hear the word taught? In 2007, Gallup Poll did a survey, and they reported that almost 50% of the people that they surveyed when asked the question: Why do you attend church? that their top two answers were these two, in order: first of all, people attended church for spiritual growth and guidance, and number two, because the church kept them grounded or inspired. All right? So spiritual growth or guidance, or the church kept them ... Now, of all the people surveyed, 50% of the people said that the primary reason that they go to church is because they receive something, they benefited, and it keeps them grounded or it grows their faith.

That's not surprising to us, is it? I mean, there's a ton of things that we do because they're a benefit to us. We could think of literally hundreds of things. In this text today, I think Paul would affirm that, but I think what we're going to see in Ephesians 4 is that he affirms it in some really unique ways. From this text, I believe that Paul tells us both how we grow ... As we grow in our faith, how do we mature? ... what we should grow into ... What does growth or maturity look like? ... and ultimately, why should even aspire to grow. I mean, what's the purpose of it? If you're a builder ... Or even for us ... We're going to put a picture up on the screen here. You're going to see a picture of the architectural rendering of our new worship center. Now, you guys know we're in the middle of facility's expansion [inaudible 00:06:40], which it's basically giving us a larger worship area. It's why we're here in this building this morning.

This is an architectural rendering of what the new worship center potentially could look like. Now, with architectural renderings, things change as building happens, but this is basically what the exterior of the building's going to look like. Now, why in the world do architects and designers and engineers, why do they do blueprints and renderings? Well, it's to give us an idea of where we're headed. What is the end goal, right? This is not reserved only for building. All of life works this way. If you have children, you take your children to a pediatrician, and the pediatricians have growth charts to measure the physical growth of our kids. We know what we're aiming at. As we grow, we know whether we've gotten there or not or what it is that's our end result.

If you're an educator, educators have standardized tests or standard measures of cognitive development to chart student's growth toward a common goal.

Whether that's a degree or the proficiency of a skill or certification, we start with an end in mind. That's how we know where we're headed. Well, the scripture's the same. This passage here in Ephesians, Paul actually tells us what the goal is. In verse 13 in chapter 4, he says that maturity looks like this: the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It shouldn't surprise us that the goal of our maturing would be Jesus. That's what we're headed for. It's what we're aiming for. So how do we get there? If that's our goal, then how do we grow? Well, I believe that Paul tells us in this passage in Ephesians four things that I want to point out this morning as we walk through this text to get us there.

The first is this: Christ's gifts are the means to our growth. Christ's gifts are the means to our growth. It is by the grace of Jesus' gifts that we can grow. You guys realize that? We're not going to grow on our own. We're not going to figure out a way to mature in our faith apart from Jesus pouring His gifts out upon us. What Paul says here is, in this passage, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts. Now, there's three things in this idea of Christ pouring out His gifts on us that I want you guys to see about Jesus and how he gives gifts. This first thing is this: Jesus gives diverse gifts to every believer. That's really, really important. You hear me? Jesus gives diverse, distinct gifts to every believer. In verse 7, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts.

Now, what is Paul saying? Paul is saying that Jesus gives every, every believer diverse, distinct gifts in kind and measure as He sees fit for a purpose. The scriptures confirm this. Jesus tells a parable in Matthew of the parable of the talents, where a wealthy man comes, and he's going to go on a journey. He leaves his servants with ... monetarily. He leaves his servants with what he calls talents. There's three different servants that are left differing amounts of money. The man goes away. He's gone for a while. He comes back, and he asks the servants to come back before him. He asks them what they've done with what's been given. And you know the story. One man, the man that's given the least, he actually goes and digs a hole, and he hides it there. The other two given differing amounts, they go and invest it. It's made more, and they come back. Well, Jesus says that the manager, the owner, the man praises the two who've done something with what they were given and chastises the man who didn't.

The ones who did something with what they were given were given more. And then if you look at Romans chapter 12, Paul talks about this differing of gifts as well when he says, "For as in one body, we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function. So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another." What is Paul getting at, and what is the scripture getting at? It's real important for us to understand, God gives gifts for a purpose. Distinct. Any person sitting in this room who has professed the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior, God has given you gifts. It will be different from the people to your right or left. It's all by Jesus' prerogative, because He has a purpose in what He's given. Whatever you have, whatever God has given you, whatever talent or gifts or abilities God has given you, that is exactly what you need to do what God has called you to do. That's amazing.

We don't have to wonder. We don't have to compare ourselves with one another because to each of us, Christ have given in accordance with the measure of His grace. We can celebrate that. Jesus gives every believer distinct gifts, but I think it's the second thing that Paul shows us in this passage, is that Jesus generously gives gifts. He is not stingy with what He gives. The scripture says it this way in verse 8, "Therefore, it says, 'When he ascended on high, He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men.'" Now, Paul quotes from Psalms 68 in Ephesians here. Psalms 68 is psalm about a victorious king. What the psalmist says and what the psalmist is declaring, "When He ascended, he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men," the psalmist is declaring ... There's a victorious king, and he goes out and he does battle with his enemies, and he conquers them.

He comes back before his people and leads his captives behind him into their midst. As he does so, he lavishes the people with the spoils of his conquering. He pours out the gifts that he ... He's led his army to be victorious. What he has gained, he gives them to the people. He returns to the people. And so Paul is saying Jesus is this victorious king that has returned from conquering His enemy, and He's lavishing all of His people with the gifts, the spoils of His reward. He says it this way. "In saying He ascended, what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above the heavens, that He might fill all things."

Now, that could be really confusing if we don't understand that what Paul is saying is, "Look, when the psalmist wrote about an earthly king who conquered his enemy and came back and led his captives before him and poured out gifts on his people, the psalmist was actually just prophesying about the depth of the victory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul says, "What does it mean He ascended?" Well, if He ascended, He had to have descended first. Jesus descended from His heavenly home. At the beginning of creation when the world was spoken into existence, Jesus was there. Jesus, by a miraculous demonstration of love, He stepped out of the heavenly realm. He descended to the earth. He stepped into the world that He had created. He became man. He walked through life and lived sinlessly, willingly laid down His righteousness, took upon Himself on our shoulders ... He took our sin from our shoulders and placed it on His own.

He climbed up on a cross and allowed Himself to be put to death by the hands of angry men. Upon His death, He descended, the scriptures tell us, descended into the depths of Hell: the place reserved for those who have rejected God and rebelled against Him. That was our place. Jesus descended into the depths of Hell. In that moment at his death, imagine Satan believes that he has put to death the Son of God and he's victorious. Jesus descends to Hell. He conquers death and sin. He comes out of Hell, back to the earth, and then ascends to His rightful place at the right hand of the Father. And like a conquering king who has gone out and conquered his enemies, He has conquered our greatest enemy: sin and death. He has led it before us, and He lavishes on us the spoils of His victory, even salvation.

Paul says, "That's Jesus. That's the way he gives gifts. He has the right to do it, and He lavishes it on us." Jesus gives every believer distinct gifts. He generously gives them. And then ultimately, Paul says in these first few verses, Jesus gifts the church, then, with leaders. Jesus gifts the church by giving it leaders. Verse 11 says, "He gave the apostles and the prophets, and the evangelists and the shepherds, and the teachers." He gave. Jesus gave the body of Christ leaders. Now, why is this important? Why is all of this important, that God gives every believer distinct gifts, that He's a generous gift giver, and that He gifts the church with leaders? Well, God expects us to grow. He expects us to grow. When we come to a believing knowledge of faith in Jesus Christ, God expects us to grow, but God provides what is necessary to make that possible.

He's the one who gives us what we need to do the thing that He expects us to do. That's grace. We grow with and through what He provides. Without Jesus and His gifts, we simply will not mature. We won't do it. Christ gives distinct gifts to every believer for the good of the body. This is what Paul tells us. Why? It's for the good of the collective body of Christ. The remarkable thing about the scriptures is that God promotes unity of His people through diversity of gifts. How cool is that, that he promotes the unity of His church through the diversity of the gifts that He gives to individuals within it? In His grace, He does this. What do we do with that? If Jesus' gifts are the means by which we grow, then let's use our gifts that Christ has given us to serve the body, the church, for our mutual growth.

God gave you something to use for the good of those sitting beside you. And the remarkable nature of that gift is that it also causes you to grow when you put it to work. Romans 12, Paul says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them." Paul says, "Gosh, guys, He's poured it out on us. Let's not sit on our thumbs. Let's do something with what He's given us for the good of those around us." Not only are Christ's gifts the means by which we grow, but I think in Ephesians, here in this passage and 4, Paul also tells us that Christ's body is the mode of our growth. His gifts are the means of our growth, and His body, the church, is the mode of our growth. He says that Christ gave the church the gift of leaders to help us grow.

In verses 11 and 12, he writes, "He gave the apostles and the prophets, and the evangelists and the shepherds, and the teachers." What for? "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ," our maturing. He gave these gifts so that we would mature, but we have to do it in the context of the church because the church itself is a gift, and the leaders in the church are a gift and move us toward this maturing of faith. It's by Christ's gifts and through the church that we grow toward maturity. Paul tells us the growth is collective. In other words, he's primarily talking here about the collective growth of the body of Christ, but that necessitates that the individual parts grow as well. The two can't be separated. Right?

At the beginning of this passage ... Sometimes we lose the sense of this when we read in the English ... but when Paul says that ... When he writes at the beginning of 4, “I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you,” you, “to walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” the you there is plural. Now, sometimes we hear it, and we think, “Oh, Paul is urging me. I read that, and he’s like, ‘You got to grow. You.’” And it absolutely means that, but Paul says you collectively. He’s writing to the church of Ephesus. The growth, the calling to which you have been called, he has called us as the body of Christ towards something specific. All of this is toward the collective growth, but it necessitates individual parts growing as well. They can’t be separated.

There’s a ton of things that I remember with fondness about growing up. Most of you know I grew up in rural West Tennessee, if my accent doesn’t give it away. My mother’s parents lived in my hometown, and they had a garden every year. It was a big garden. There are a ton of things that we grew: okra, squash, zucchini. I mean, if you could grow it, we’ve grown it. But the one thing that I remember, or the two things that I remember the most are beans. We would grow green beans. I spent a ton of my childhood sitting around a TV, watching the Atlanta Braves play baseball, snapping green beans, and shelling purple hull peas until my fingers looked like I’d been playing with an ink pen. That was my childhood. I’ve got a picture up here for you. It’s a picture of bush bean seeds. Okay? So green beans. That’s the seeds.

Now, the remarkable thing about a seed is within a seed, there’s everything necessary for it to become a plant. But if those seeds sit in a bag, in the dark, in the basement, they’re not going to grow. They can’t will themselves into a bush that grows beans. They can’t will themselves into the next picture, right, the sprout. How do they get there? What’s necessary for a seed to grow? Well, within it, it’s got the potential for life, but it needs all of these other things that are brought to the table. Paul says we’re like that. If he’s spoken into our lives, we can’t grow on our own. That there are other things that have to happen and be a part of our grow. That we need one another. By God’s design, He’s made us to need one another. You see, verses 7 and 11 here in Ephesians chapter 4, both tell us that the body, the church, needs us as individuals, you and me.

If we’re professing believers, the body needs us to grow. That’s remarkable. But verses 12 through 16 tell us that we need the body to grow. We can’t do it with only one or the other. Both are necessary. What do we do with this? If Christ’s body is the mode, the church is where we grow and being a part of it is how we grow, then what do we do? Well, let’s recognize and receive Christ’s gifts within the body for our mutual growth. Let’s use our gifts, right? If Jesus gives us gifts for our growth, let’s use them for the good of the body so we mutually grow. Let’s realize that God gives us the church. Let’s recognize the gifting of the church and of leaders in the church, and of the uniqueness of those varying roles for our good so that there’ll be mutual growth. Now, why does God do all of this? What is the point of this grace that He’s lavished upon us by the generous giving of gifts?

Is it simply that you or I would mature into the best person we could be? Is that the end result? If the end goal is the perfection of our individual gifts and our individual lives for our lives' sake, then our world is incredibly small. Instead, I think Paul is saying this. He's showing us that even our personal maturing in the faith is for a greater purpose. Christ's gifts are the means of our growth. The church, Christ's body, is the mode of our growth. Christ glorified is the goal of our growth. Remember, we started with the end in mind. What is our goal? If we're aiming toward maturity, how do we know what that looks like? It's Jesus. Paul says that all of this giving of gifts for the purpose of the equipping of the saints is meant for growth, and then he tells us what growth is. When he says the saints, guess what, guys? That's every believer. That's not a distinct few.

If you profess Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior, you are called a saint. Paul is saying that the individual gifts that believers bring to the table and the collective gift of the church and church leadership is for this reason: that the saints, that the collective body, would be equipped for the work of ministry. What is the work of ministry, right? There's all of these questions that we have to ask when we read the text. If the point is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, what is the work of ministry? Now, you might believe that the work of ministry is reserved only for those who are paid church staff. All right? The "work" of ministry. Well, who's going to do the ministering? Well, that's reserved for pastors or leaders or directors or elders or deacons, whatever name you want to attach to a role of leadership in the context of the church. But guess what? That couldn't be further from the truth.

Paul says the saints, that's you and me, that we all should be equipped for ministry, and that ministry is this: "The building up of the body," right? "The growth, the collective growth of the whole, until we all attain unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The goal of our growth is that we would grow into Jesus, and that by doing so, that Jesus would be exalted. The work of ministry is the mission of God. What is God's mission? It's to fill the earth with the fullness of His glory. In the beginning of this letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul says in chapter 1, Paul says, "Christ saved us so that we might be to the praise of His glory." Why were you saved? So that Jesus might be praised.

Now, you might think, "Well, that's selfish. How does that benefit me?" Here's the beauty of how God has made us. God made us to where we're most fulfilled when He's most exalted. We were made for a purpose, and that purpose was to reflect the image of the one who made us. In other words, we're to point back toward the greatness of the one who crafted us. He made us to praise and worship Him. We're most fulfilled when we're doing the very thing that He called us to. The goal of our growth is Jesus glorified. It's to fulfill what he's called us to. This is a theme that resonates all across scripture. In Psalms 72, the psalmist writes, "Blessed be His," God's, "glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with His Glory."

2 Thessalonians chapter 1, Paul says it this way, “To this end, we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of His calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power.” Why? “So that the name of Jesus would be glorified in you,” and then get this, “and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus exalted means we’re raised. How crazy is that, that that’s the ... To me, that’s some of the mystery of the Gospel: that God, by His grace, would rescue us when we didn’t deserve it, to make us sons and daughters, and to elevate us to the status of co-heirs with Jesus so that Jesus might be exalted and we would be raised as well. What is the goal of our maturing? That we would become like Jesus, and that He would be worshiped in response to it.

The work of ministry moves us toward maturity, the building up of the body of Christ. That mature body is unified in faith and knowledge of Jesus and matures into the fullness of Jesus. It’s knowing Jesus. It’s exalting Him. That’s the purpose, the point, and the prize of our lives. Salvation’s prize is not that we get to go to Heaven. Salvation’s prize is that God gives us Himself. He is to be praised and exalted for that. The word of God says God’s nearness is our good. In other words, that salvation’s gift is that God would reconcile us so that we could stand in the presence of the one who made us. It’s in that moment, in that place that we are most fulfilled, because we’re doing what we were made to do. Jesus lavishes gifts on us so that He might move us toward that goal.

What do we do with all of that? Well, let’s exalt Jesus as the standard of maturity into which we strive to grow. Right? Let’s exalt Him and look to Him as, that is what maturity looks like. It’s Jesus Christ. We’re growing into the head of the body. And let’s worship Him in response to the grace that He’s poured out on us. Let’s worship Him. Think about art. All right? We can be mesmerized by art for all different kinds of reasons. You can get lost in the beauty and intrigue of a piece of artwork and herald it as something magnificent. Take, for instance, the picture that we’re going to put on the screen. This is a famous painting, *Starry Night*. I think. Maybe. There we go. All right, there we go. *Starry Night*. You may recognize this painting. Van Gogh painted it. It’s one of the top 10 most magnificent and well-known paintings in the whole world.

You can get lost in the richness of the painting, but we don’t look at the painting and praise the painting as if the painting made itself. We can marvel at the beauty of it, but it leads us to marvel at the giftedness of the one who made it. It’s not the painting that fashioned itself. It’s the hand of the artist, the creator, who made it glorious. When we look at a painting like *Starry Night* and we’re mesmerized by its beauty, then actually, what we’re doing is praising the one who made it. Our lives are no different. If we look at ourselves and think we’re the point to our lives, then we become glory thieves, as if a painting would rob glory from the one who made it. God fashioned us, and the giftedness that He pours out on us is ultimately not to raise us up for our own praise, but to point back to Him for His glory.

Now, the beauty is that we benefit from that. That's the grace of God, that we benefit from His being exalted by the very gifts that He gives us to move us toward maturity. His glory is our good, and we're most fulfilled when He's most exalted. Christ's gifts are the means to our growth. Christ's church is the mode of our growth. Christ glorified is the goal of our growth. Finally, I think Paul tells us how we're to mature and how we measure maturity. This is what he does. I believe he shows us that Christ's love is the measure of our growth. He says in verse 16, "From which 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 what? "Love." Well, what kind of love? Well, I think it's specific, but the bottom line is that love is the measure of our growth.

If we want to see we're maturing, then that's most visible in our love. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 ... Famous passage that you'll hear at almost every wedding ... "If I speak in the tongues of men and angels but I have not love, I'm a noisy gong or a clanging symbol." He goes on to say, "If I speak eloquently and I say all these right things but there's no love in my heart, I'm nothing and it's for nothing." Love has to be there for any of it to matter. Love is more than verbal. If I love my wife and I tell her every day, "Ellie, I love you," but I never do anything that is consistent that actually supports the verbalizing of my love, then she may doubt my love. Right? Well, if love can ... It has to be more than simply a verbalization of affection. It's a way in which we live.

What's unique, I believe, about the love that Paul calls us to is that it's not something that we generate ourselves. Right? If the measure of our maturity is our love, then does that mean that we stir our love up? Well, no. In fact, John says in 1 John chapter 4, "This is love: not that we've loved God, but that He loved us and He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, so we also to love one another." Guys, do you hear what John is saying and what Paul is affirming in Ephesians? We love because we have been given love. The example of the love to which we aspire is nothing short of the very thing that saved us: the sending of Jesus by God, sending the Son to become the propitiation for our sins to make our payment that we owed for our sinfulness. That's the demonstration of love to which God calls us to and the measure of love by which we will know if we've grown.

Jesus, in fact, says in the Gospel of John chapter 13, "This is a new commandment that I give you, that you love one another." How? "Just as I have loved you ..." Right? 1 John 4, "Not that you love me, but that I loved you first so that you love one another" ... "so also you are to love one another. By this," by this love, by reflecting the love that I have given to you, "all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another." God calls us to maturity. Maturity is nothing less than the picture of Jesus Himself and Jesus glorified. The measure of whether we've reached it as individuals and believers is love. And all of that, where does it come from? It comes from the hand of God. In grace, He pours out His love on us, gives us what we need to grow into what He wants us to grow into, which is Jesus and Him glorified, and then says the measure of that love will be the very love that I've poured out on you, that you would demonstrate that to one another.

What do we do with this? Well, let's build one another up in love by encouraging each other with God's great truths. Now, why would Paul say that we would speak the truth in love? Why is it necessary that we speak the truth in love? Well, what is the truth we're speaking? It's the very thing that brings us love. The truth that we're speaking is nothing less than the Gospel of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. As we come together, how do we encourage one another toward growth? We speak of the greatness of the gift that God has lavished on us, the very sending of Jesus, His Son, on our behalf. As we speak the Gospel to one another in love because we're overwhelmed by what He's done for us, and it spills out of us to the right and the left and into those around us, we're encouraged and we grow in maturity because Jesus is being exalted.

See how it all fits together? It's miraculous. And all of this from the hand of God. All of this if God pours His grace out on us collectively as a body. Paul writes all this, and he says as a body of believers, we ought to mature into the head of the body, Jesus Christ Himself, and that the measure of that growth and maturity will be the very love that He demonstrated for us lived out among us. All of this in the context of community. Paul's charge is to the church. The growth is for the collective body. It's bigger than any of us, but it matters to each of us. God, in a mystery of grace ... all of these things, this idea of maturity and growth, to be true of all of us collectively as a church, it must be true of each of us. Let's pray to that end.

Father, would You give us the grace to see that You've called us to grow, but that You give us what we need to grow? God, would you help us as individual believers to recognize that You've poured out Your grace on us, distinct among each of us, for a purpose, that You've called us to a task that how we live matters to the person on our right and our left, that if we don't use the gifts that You've given us, they suffer? Likewise, if they don't use the gifts that they've been given, we suffer. If we don't come collectively as a group of people and move through life together, that we cannot grow. For all of the faults of the church, as we are sinful people, You have deemed it necessary that we need each other. That the church can't grow without each individual part, and each individual part can't grow without the whole. We need You. By grace, You tell us You give us what we need.

Let us live that out even today, that we might reflect the greatness of what You've done for us and that Your glory would fill the earth, that those who don't know you would see the work of what You've done and that they would marvel and come to saving faith, and the body of Christ would grow numerically and it would add to the grace that has been poured out, and that we would, again, grow as You are exalted. God, as we come even now to give of our tithes and our offering, let us see that even that as a way that You've blessed us, that we might be a blessing, that we might mature. Let our giving be a demonstration of our love. God, You have loved best and You have loved most by the sending of Jesus. We say thank you for the grace of a savior. It's in His powerful name that we pray these things. Amen.



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