

Characteristics of a True Church, Part 4

Scripture: Ephesians 4:7–16

Code: 90-459

I want to draw your attention to the fourth chapter of Ephesians as we continue our series on How to Recognize a Real Church. And I do understand that we are covering some sort of basic truth; this might be called Ecclesiology 101, basic teaching on the nature of the church drawn from the New Testament. But in every generation of life at Grace Community Church, this is germane to how we view our experience here and it is essential for us to understand. I don't want to ever take for granted that people who come to Christ, come to Grace Church, understand what they need to understand about the life of the church. We can't assume that, and we can't even assume it on the basis of the fact that some folks had come from other churches, because we can no longer assume that having been in the church is necessarily the way you would find out the truth about the church, sad as that may be.

And I'm afraid in the big scheme of things in the contemporary church movement, attending church has become a kind of a spectator experience, you go to watch what happens, essentially. This, as you well know, is the most narcissistic, self-absorbed, self-centered society that America has ever known and becoming increasingly more so, if that is possible. People are basically disinterested in anything that doesn't accrue to their own benefit. And churches have decided, I suppose, to accommodate that and so churches have become locations where certain forms of religious entertainment are displayed for people who in many cases sit in a dark room and watch the event take place. Churches are staffed very largely by paid professionals financed by the spectators. Very little and sometimes nothing is asked of those people except occasionally to give some money so that they can continue the production. And this, of course, fits the kind of culture that we have.

We have, on the one hand, a sort of couch potato culture, and on the other hand, a fitness culture. In both cases, the idea is to give away your life to satisfy yourself, rather than someone else. Self-indulgence marks the culture in general. They may do only what they want; they want to do in the way they want to do it when and how they choose to do it. If they work hard, it probably is for personal gain. If they stay fit, it is probably for personal satisfaction. They're more concerned about fitness as a way to put themselves on display than they are as a means to taking the gospel, for example, to a very hard place where they would need to have a measure of fitness to survive effectively.

Contemporary churches even offer fitness classes, but they're not in the mission department. They're not designed to equip people to trudge down dirt roads in third-world countries and live a minimalist's life. The age is hopelessly indulgent and dominated by self-fulfillment, pre-occupation with success.

Self-sacrifice ministry, giving your life away, abandoning yourself for others is a very distant memory.

Now this is devastating to relationships, devastating to relationships. Devastating to them before they start because everyone is consumed with himself or herself and devastating to them after they actually begin because they are shattered in the collision of two selfish people. Any relationship is only possible, any true relationship, any binding and lasting relationship, is only possible when it is held together by selfless, humble love. And any relationship is only as strong as that selfless, humble love.

So, in the church when we talk about the church as a fellowship of people giving away their lives for each other and for the loss, this is a definition that is somewhat alien to the contemporary understanding of the church. Many churches wouldn't even ask people to serve, they wouldn't ask people to get involved, they wouldn't ask people to make sacrifices because it might make them uncomfortable. It might raise the bar of expectation and they wouldn't want to have to be held to that level of expectation, and that might send them out the back door to a different place where they don't have such a high standard.

Churches have become preoccupied with existing to meet people's felt needs and to satisfy their wants. They are no longer fellowships of those who are sacrificial, those who want to give their lives away. Through the ages the church has basically been carried to the ends of the earth on the backs of those people who were purposely and relentlessly self-sacrificing. They gave up their lives for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Christ, for the sake of the church. That kind of sacrifice is the benchmark of the history of missions and the history of the church. All the history of the true church is filled with the memory of the noble Christians, and they are noble because of their devotion to Scripture, because of their humility, because of their zeal, because of their selflessness, because of their sacrifice. They are noble, they are memorable. They are the subjects of biographies and historical records because they gave their lives away for the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in and through His church. These are the ones you know and there are many more that are unknown and unnamed who faithfully serve the Lord and will be known to us only when we reach heaven.

Nothing has really changed; nothing from God's perspective has changed even though it has changed on earth in the professing church. The church is still called to be a fellowship of people selflessly and humbly giving their lives away sacrificially to one another and to those outside. And that's what I want to talk to you about tonight.

We have been working our way through the marks of a real church. We've talked about the absolute authority of Scripture that marks a real church. We've talked about the priority of true worship. We've talked about doctrinal clarity, spiritual discernment. We've talked about the pursuit of holiness. We've spoken and we did this in our last session, of the real church being identified by a plurality of godly leaders who feed and lead the flock and live exemplary lives that set the pattern to be followed.

And then we finished up with a discussion of the necessary commitment in the church to discipleship. That is, to engage in the process of seeing the believers grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. There was a very well-known pastor who put out a blog in the last couple of weeks in which he said, he declared for the whole world to see, "I resign, I am through from fixing people. You can take this job and"...blank..."no longer will I be engaged in fixing people." That is the life of the church, as we all need fixing, and we need more of it all the time.

So we looked at that last time, that the life of the church is a life of mutual commitment to see one another grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, come to the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ--which we're going to look at in a moment--to grow up in the knowledge of Christ, to become mature, to become spiritual fathers who know Him who is from the beginning, to receive from one and give to another. Paul tells Timothy, "What you've received from me, give to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." So we ended up talking about discipleship.

Now I want to come to what is in my little list, number eight in the marks of a real church, and this would be simply titled, "Mutual Loving Ministry," "Mutual Loving Ministry." And that takes us back to the introduction. The church is a fellowship of people who are engaged in loving expression of ministry to one another. In John 13:34 and 35 Jesus said, "By your love they will know you," "by your love they will know you." We heard that given in the testimonies in baptism tonight, the people viewed Christians and saw the reality of their love for each other, their demonstrable care for and ministry to each other. And that was a convincing reality as regards the true work of salvation.

Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, tells them that this is so basic that he says, "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren." This isn't something that requires information. If the breath of God has come on you, and He has if you have been redeemed, the Spirit Himself is shed abroad in your heart. And with the shedding of the Spirit abroad in your heart, love has been shed abroad in your heart as we heard also from Romans 5:5, and so you don't need someone to teach you to love one another. You're taught by God the Holy Spirit to do that. That is foundational to the life of the church. That's why in Acts 2, immediately when people were redeemed on the Day of Pentecost, they were found studying the apostles doctrine, praying. And they were in breaking bread and fellowship, communion--a word that means partnership, participation, life together.

The New Testament is clear that this life together embodies the one-anothers of the New Testament. There are many of the one-anothers. You can look them up in your computer list, or in your concordance, and you will find a myriad of one-anothers. They define life in the church in terms of mutual care and mutual spiritual ministry.

We also know that the New Testament talks about spiritual gifts. First Peter 4, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 speak of the gifts that the Lord of the church has given to every member of the church to be distributed mutually among those in the church for their spiritual benefit and education. Now that is really what is on my heart as we come to the study of the Word of God tonight. And I want you to look with me at Ephesians chapter 4 because here is a good starting point to understand the mutual ministry that is to occur in the church.

We can begin in 4:7, and I'll read this to you: "But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' (Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and to the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 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 and deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 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." And we can stop there.

One of the greatest passages in all of the New Testament on fellowship, the mutual life of the church, so very foundational. What this is saying is that we are all to be engaged. The equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, builds up the body of Christ. The saints are equipped, they do the work of ministry, the body is built up and in the building up of the body of Christ, we attain to Christ's likeness and then our message, the truth which we speak in love, is undergirded by our lives and it has a great impact. It puts Christ on display.

Now we all know that basic sense of what this passage is teaching, but let me drill down a little bit into it for our edification tonight. This is strong motivation for us to serve in the church. And I know even at Grace Community Church where so many thousands of people are engaged in ministry, there are always going to be those who are spectators, who do nothing more than show up and absorb what they see and what they hear and make a minimal commitment. That is unacceptable to our Lord and should be unacceptable to you as well, since the love of Christ has been shed abroad in your heart, since you have been gifted by the Holy Spirit, taught by God to demonstrate that love in mutual ministry.

So let this passage then in general to be a call for us to mutual ministry, which is the very life of the church. Let me give you some motives for it...Okay?...out of this passage.

Motive number one, because of the source of our service, because of the source of our service. Back to verse 7, "But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." "But to each one of us." He's just been talking in the opening six verses about the unity of the church: "one body," verse 4, "one Spirit, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Unity--we're all one. But in that unity there is diversity, and that's the point of verse 7. "But"...there's a transition..."to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." We all have these things in common. We all are part of the one body, possess the one Spirit, have one hope, believe in one Lord, hold to one faith, receive one baptism under one God and Father of all. We all have that in common.

But then there is the uncommon uniqueness of the body of Christ in that each one of us has been graced with a gift that is measured out to us by Christ--to each one of us, each one of us. There is no such thing as a believer who is not gifted for ministry in the body of Christ. This too is a grace. It is a grace; it is an undeserved favor; it is not something we earn. It comes according to the measure of Christ's gift. Measure is *dorea*; it's a word that emphasizes...the word gift, I should say, is a word that emphasizes the freeness of it. *Dorea*--it's a free gift; you don't buy it; you don't purchase it; you don't earn it; you are given it, and it is measured out by the determining purpose of Christ. Okay? So the source of your gift is Christ who has designed that gift, measured out that gift, and given you freely that gift by which you are to minister in the church. That is what verse 7 is saying. Every believer possesses such gifts.

Turn for a moment to Romans chapter 12 and let's look at the two definitive passages on these gifts, Romans 12:3, "For through the grace given to me, I say to everyone that you ought not to think more highly...that he ought not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound judgment as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." There's that word again, that measure that God has allotted to every believer. God has measured out an allotment to every believer that is unique to that believer.

Verse 4, "There are many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function." There we are again, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one body, one hope of our calling, one God and Father, and yet there are many members. Verse 5. "There is one body but they're individual members one of another, and we have gifts that differ according again to the grace given to us." These are freely given gifts. This again emphasizing the source. They are given to us, end of verse 6, "according to the proportion of faith." In other words, God determines the measure by His grace and gives us a proportion of faith to work the gift. The proportion of faith, the proportion of grace is consistent with the expectation bound up in the gift. They're gifts of service, gifts of teaching, of exhortation, of giving, of leading, of showing mercy, as you see going down to verse 8. Those are

simply categories of gifts. There are some who serve. There are some who teach. There are some who exhort. There are some who give. There are some who lead with diligence. There are some who are merciful and who demonstrate that mercy with cheerfulness.

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and there's a parallel passage to this that has a couple of interesting things to comment on. In verse 4, again there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit. We are back then to this diversity within unity. The same Spirit, one Lord, one faith, all of that, but varieties of gifts--there are varieties of ministries but the same Lord. There are varieties of effects but the same God who works all things in all persons. And here it comes again, just as we read it in Ephesians 4, "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." So you are given by God Himself a gift. It is a manifestation of the Spirit; it is a free gift of grace; it comes with a proportion of faith so that it can operate in its fullness for the benefit of the church, for the common good. For some, there is given the word of wisdom; for another, the word of knowledge; for another, faith; for another, gifts of healing; for another, the effecting of miracles; for another, prophecy or preaching; for another, distinguishing of spirits or discernment; for another, various kinds of languages; for another, the interpretation of languages. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each individual just as He wills.

Again, it is the uniqueness of these gifts given by the Holy Spirit, by grace, with a measure of faith to every individual believer. That's the emphasis here. And in verse 12 that is the reason, though the body is one, it has many members and these members have many, many functions. Now some of those gifts, as you know, were sign gifts that were unique to the apostolic era--miracles, healing, speaking foreign languages that were unlearned, and having the ability to interpret or translate foreign languages without knowing the language. Those were temporary sign gifts. There are other gifts that are permanent gifts, and some of those are indicated here as well.

One other passage, in 1 Peter 4, the discussion of those differences is for another time. But 1 Peter 4 gives us another look at this issue of giftedness and it comes back again to the same kind of language. "We are called," according to verse 8, "to fervent love for one another." "Fervent love for one another." The word there is "fervent," *ektenes*. It's a word that refers to the stretching of a muscle to its limits. We are to love to the extreme of our capacity to love; that's how we're to love one another. That kind of love will cover a multitude of sins.

And then in verse 10, again we're back to this individual emphasis, "As each one has received a gift." "As each one has received a gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Again the grace of God is the source of this gift. It is a gift of grace unearned. It is given by God uniquely to each individual. He divides these gifts into two categories: whoever speaks, do it as one who is speaking the utterance of God; whoever serves, do it as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies. So there are speaking gifts and serving gifts. There are verbal gifts and non-verbal gifts in that sense. Every one of us is given a gift. This gift is a gift of grace. This gift is

accompanied by the measure of faith so that it can operate. We can believe in the use of that gift because we are granted the faith for the measure of that gift.

How are we to understand this? If you compare Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, they're different categories mentioned which means they're not hard and fast gifts. In the past there have been people who have tried to identify these gifts as kind of fixed gifts, and they've even put out tests that you can take, surveys you can run through to find out precisely and exactly what gift you have. That's not the way to understand them. The fact that Peter writes and doesn't even define the categories, Paul defines the categories very loosely and even throws in some apostolic gifts--does that in writing to the Corinthians, but in Romans there's even a different list, lets you know that these are not very tight categories, but rather broad areas of giftedness in serving and speaking. And the best way to understand it is this, that the gift that you have is uniquely yours. It's as if these categories are colors on a pallet and God dips His brush and paints you with a mix of the colors available on the pallet.

If somebody would say to me, "What is your gift?" I would say the gift that God has given to me is the combination of abilities in the Spirit that enabled me to minister to the body of Christ. It isn't one thing. Sometimes it's preaching; sometimes it's teaching; sometimes it's leading. And there are other things that are fit into that that make my kind of preaching and my kind of teaching have an emphasis different than someone else's preaching and teaching. This is the gift that is given to me and in that sense I'm a spiritual snowflake--and so are you. God blends together these categories so that you are uniquely you, and God has painted you exactly the color that He wants you to be to fit into the beauty of the picture that He's painting of His church. Another way to understand that would be to say if you don't do what you've been gifted to do, what you've been gifted to do doesn't get done because this isn't all about sticking anybody in where you might be.

Categories of giftedness, broad categories of giftedness and speaking and serving blended together into individual gifts. We're not talking about talents. We're not talking about abilities. We're not talking about natural capability. We're talking about supernatural abilities granted by the Holy Spirit to function with a spiritual impact in the body of Christ to the benefit of others. You have to see that as your life.

We talked about spiritual snowflakes; how about fingerprints? Every one of us have different fingerprints. God has marked us out and identified us uniquely by our fingerprints and so has He by our giftedness. You cannot develop a test that can in a hard and fast way discern a gift.

I remember spending several hours on a long trip in a car with a man who had written a book on this and had figured out how to identify these kinds of things without accuracy. And after three or four hours driving, sitting next to him in the front seat and having him analyze me, he said, "You're not any of these things, none of these categories work with you." And I said, "You have two choices. You can throw your theory away or you can interview somebody who is a better fit. The right thing to do would

be to throw your theory away.”

The source of this is God Himself and the Lord of the church and the Holy Spirit who dispenses the gift. Not to use your gift is an affront to God, an affront to Christ; it is an indifference to the Holy Spirit. It is a rebuff of divine love. It is disobedience to your duty. It is to shirk your calling, to ignore the very purpose for which God has placed you and powered you in His church. Every believer must look at the source of giftedness and find in that a motivation to be faithful.

I want to give my life to the church using the gifts that I possess by the Holy Spirit as a way in which--really the premiere way in which individually I can give honor to the giver of my gift, to the giver.

You say, “Well how do I know what my gift is?” It’s not difficult. You don’t need to analyze it. “What spiritual ministry do you do, and when you do it is blessed by God and you find in it joy and satisfaction?” That’s the kind of question you ask, and some of you would have a hard time asking and answering that because you’re not doing anything.

All right, number two--we should be motivated to use our gifts because of the source from which they come--and secondly, because of the cost by which they were provided, the cost. Come down in to Ephesians chapter 4 and a very powerful portion of Scripture, we’ll pick it up in verse 8. “Therefore,” it says, “He who...when He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives and He gave gifts to men.” Then it goes on to talk about He ascended, He descended. What is this about?

Well it’s, at first, a little bit obscure, I admit. Paul is using a kind of parenthetical analogy here, and he’s drawing his words from Psalm 68--from Psalm 68 so that verse 8 is kind of a general allusion to the Old Testament verse from Psalm 68 that is a victory hymn composed by David to celebrate God’s conquest of the Jebusite city that became Jerusalem and the triumphant ascent of God to Jerusalem represented by the ark up on Mount Zion. In other words, it’s a picture of God’s triumph in the past. After a king won a victory, he would bring home the spoils and he would ascend to the highest hill in front of his people. He would be paraded and he would bring with him the recovered captives that his enemies had captured, bringing home the POWs, if you will, the recaptured captives, prisoners who had been taken and now were brought back to their homeland.

This kind of imagery borrowed from the psalm suits the apostle who pictures a triumphant Christ returning from His battle on earth to the glory of the heavenly city, and He’s brought with Him the trophies of his great triumph and His great victory. What he’s talking about in the fact that He descended is that Christ came to earth and that He then ascended, that He went back into glory. He’s looking at His incarnation, His death, His resurrection, in which He conquers Satan, conquers sin, conquers death, as indicated in Colossians 2:15. And by that triumphant victory, He goes back into glory. He ascends on high, verse 8, and leads captive a host of captives.

In other words, the prisoners who once belonged to the enemy Satan that He has delivered, He now returns to God for they are by God's decree His own people. By His triumphant work of descending, Christ then ascends triumphantly and takes His people, as it were, to glory. And out of that triumph, end of verse 8, "He gave gifts to men," "He gave gifts to men." As the triumphant consequence, the triumphant conqueror distributed the spoils of His victory to His people. He gave gifts to His people. After His ascension, you know, when the Lord went back, He began to give thanks. The first gift He gave was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus actually said the Holy Spirit cannot come until I have ascended, remember that? When I go back to the Father, I will send the Holy Spirit, John 7; John 14; and we know, of course, it's reiterated in the second chapter of Acts--the Holy Spirit actually comes. With the sending of the Holy Spirit to the church come the gifts, the gifts.

So what verses 9 and 10 are doing, are doing, is simply sort of expositing that quote from the psalm in verse 8. He descended into the lower parts, referring to the earth. He then ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. And He therefore triumphed, He therefore won the victory and then disperses to the church, which He has now won, those gifts that they need to minister to one another and to make Christ in the world to draw men to Himself.

Divestiture before investiture, incarnation before glorification; so Christ came down and went up so that He might give gifts to His church. Then, in particular, this is such a great passage, we have the first and most notable gifts identified for us in verse 11. "And He gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers [or pastor/teachers] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry." The Lord goes back to heaven, far above the heaven that we can see, fills eternity with His glory, having accomplished His work and now sends the Holy Spirit and then sends gifts to the church. The first wave of gifts to the church are the gifted men, the apostles, the prophets, chronologically followed by the evangelists and pastor/teachers, whose task it is to then equip all the saints for the use of all the gifts. So foundational. "He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastor/teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry to the building up of the body of Christ." "To build the house," *oikodomeo*; we get the word "domestic." And *oikos* is the word for house--"to build the house."

Pulling this all together, the sacrificial work of Christ--His humiliation, His condescension, His suffering, His sacrificial death, His sin bearing--is to rescue sinners who belong to God by God's divine, eternal decree; to rescue them from the hellish grip of Satan, sin, death and damnation; to pay for them the supreme price to win the captives; to lead them back to the one to whom they belong by sovereign choice. This was the cost then of our gifts. It cost Christ His eternal glory. It cost Him His life. It cost Him at the cross. It cost Him in that sacrifice in which He felt the full fury of the wrath of God against all the sins of all who would ever believe--that's the price.

So think about that when you think about your responsibility to minister in the life of the church. Think about the source of your gift, it comes from God Himself. Think about the cost of your gift, Christ paid the supreme price. And we've done everything we could through the years to grasp the massive nature of that sacrifice of sin-bearing on our behalf. I am compelled then to use my gifts as one who is called to be a pastor/teacher and to help develop the gifts of all the people in the church, to use my gift to that end because of the price that was paid for that gift, as well as the source of it.

Thirdly, in this passage we see one other very important motivation for the use of our gifts, and we're looking at the passage, obviously, in a broad sense. And we saw first, because of the source of it, two, because of the cost of it, and three, because of the impact, because of the impact. What is the impact of the use of my gift within the framework of the body of Christ? What happens when we are equipped and the gifted men do the equipping? We have been given equipping gifts so that you can use your serving gifts. What is the effect?

Verse 13, "We all attain to the unity of the faith. We all attain to the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. This is a monumental effect. What it says is that when the gifted men equip the saints, when they give their entire lives, if you will, to fixing people, maturing people, when they have birth pains until Christ is fully formed in them, when they work to the point of sweat and exhaustion to see the saints perfected, as Paul says in Colossians, what is the effect? The saints "attain the unity of the faith." In other words, they come to hold commonly the truth. That's doctrine. And then that truth begins to be shown in their lives because the knowledge of the Son of God leads to a mature man who then as a part of the church puts the stature, which belongs to the fullness of Christ, on display. Ideally people should come to a church and see Christ. They should see a manifestation of Christ in the maturity of the saints who name His name.

The first impact of the gifted men using their gifts for the equipping of the saints is the unity of the faith. That refers to objective faith to the body of Christian doctrine. You see people who believe the truth, who know the truth, who embrace the truth, who hold convictions about the truth and love the truth. That's where it has to start. The gifted then have that primary responsibility to distribute the truth, disseminate the truth, teach the truth, so that in knowing the truth you come to the *epignosis* of the Son of God; the deep knowledge, not superficial knowledge, the deep knowledge, the deep full understanding of what it is to live a life devoted to Christ; the deep knowledge that Paul longed for in Philippians 3, "That I may know Him," "that I may know Him." And so, coming to the deep knowledge of Christ, the church becomes a mature man and takes on, as it were, "the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

If there's anyone that we want to put on display in our church, it's Him, is it not? It's not me. It's other teachers. We're simply the instruments who have been grace gifted by God with a measure of faith and a supernatural capability in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring to you the truth that equips you,

that shapes you into an understanding of who Christ is and then begins to make you look like Christ as it works its way through your life and brings you to maturity. This is what we do so that we are not on display in the church; but Christ is on display in the church.

I often say that when Shepherds' Conference comes around, that remarkably when people come here, they don't walk away talking about John MacArthur. They walk away talking about the church. They walk away having seen a church that demonstrates the character of Christ.

So the first impact is a positive impact. It is an objective knowledge of the truth that goes deep and conforms us to Christ. There is also a negative, a necessary negative impact, as a result of the gifted men equipping the saints and the saints using their gifts. We are no longer children tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming. That's parallel to the objective faith. We no longer are children. We no longer are unstable. We no longer are victims of deception. We no longer chase illusions and fads. We're no longer spiritual children. In the language of 1 John 2, we become spiritual young men. We're strong in the Word; we've overcome the wicked one. We're not gullible. We're not susceptible to being lured by cults and 'isms. We're not carried about by everything that blows along, every deception, every trick, every crafty delusion.

So there is a positive influence. We grow up to know sound doctrine. That sound doctrine takes root in our lives and begins to transform us together into the image of Christ and we are no longer susceptible to being led astray by satanic error. But what characterizes us is in verse 15. "We speak the truth in love. We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ 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." That is a powerful, powerful statement.

What happens when the gifted men do the work that God has called them to do and equip the saints? And the saints do the work of service using their individual gifts? What happens is we come to maturity; we come to Christ's likeness. We are not any longer led astray by deception and false doctrine, but rather we're characterized by the truth proclaimed in love and we grow up into Him who is the head, even Christ. The whole body then is fitted and held together by what every joint supplies according to the proper working of each individual part and it grows for the building of itself up in love.

The final is where we started at the beginning. "By this they'll know you're My disciples by your love." By your love. If there was anything that Christ demonstrated on earth, it was the love of God. It was the love of God as He came to save sinners who redeemed unworthy enemies. And if the church is to be known for anything, it is to be known by its love. We are to be built up in love, loving one another. Love only operates with humble people, sacrificial people and the church only grows into the fullness of the stature of Christ when believers in love use their spiritual gifts.

The message is pretty clear. And again we've just done an overview of this. We need to be using our gifts in the church. You don't want to be a spectator. You don't want to sit and watch the show here. As great as it is to sit and experience it, if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're unfaithful--you're unfaithful to your calling and you're unfaithful to your gifts, and you're unfaithful to your church unless you are ministering to each other. You should be motivated by the source of the gift that you have; it was given by God. Motivated by the cost of the gift; it was purchased by the death of Christ and His suffering. And motivated by the impact of that gift; it is...it is necessary for "the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come to the stature of the fullness of Christ," because every joint, every individual part is doing what it is designed to do to build the body up in love.

So, how do you recognize a true church? Well, you recognize a true church because the things that we've been talking about in Ephesians 4 describe the life of that church. This has been a passion in my heart since the first time I ever stood up to talk about this decades ago, and it has not diminished at all.

There's one other statement that I would like to make to you. There's one other motive and for that I want to turn to another passage. It should be enough that we look at the source of our gift and the cost of our gift and the impact of our using that gift, but let's look at 1 Corinthians 3:9, let me give you one more motive. First Corinthians 3:9, thinking in the same context, Paul says, "We are God's fellow workers." "We are God's fellow workers." What a statement. We are not spectators; we are God's fellow workers. Verse 10, he says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me"— "according to the grace gift given to me, like a master builder who is wise, I laid a foundation and someone else is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds. But no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

What's that saying? That what you do with your gift will determine your eternal reward. It will define your eternity. So if you are lazy now and indifferent and uninvolved, you will receive a diminished eternal reward and need to be reminded that your eternal reward is eternal. So let each of you be careful, take care, think deeply about your service as to whether or not you want to build with wood, hay and stubble, or gold, silver, and precious stones. Whether you want to build with what is valuable, or what is essentially useless because your work will determine your eternal reward.

There's plenty of motivation there, isn't there, for us to be faithful in serving our Lord in His church. I can't imagine any other kind of life. I can't imagine not serving in every possible capacity that I'm capable of, and I'm sure I've launched into some that I'm not capable of. But I can't find any other

raison d'être, I can't find any other reason to live other than to do in the church what the Lord has called and gifted me to do, and I hope that's your passion as well.

Father, we thank You again for the Word. Every time we give it out, we are bound to offer thanks. We feel like we need to sing a doxology every time. We praise Your name for the clarity of the truth. We thank You for the calling You've given to us. Now at this point this is truth declared and I would pray, O God, that it would become truth applied, that something would happen in the hearts of individuals here, in every heart, that would move these precious people from wherever they are in their service to a higher level and a greater devotion. Don't let us get caught up in the system in which we live. Don't let us be defined by the things that define the unregenerate world. Let us be in every sense kingdom people who give our lives selflessly and sacrificially for that cause, which is everlasting and who according to the grace given to us build on the foundation who is Jesus Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones. May we serve You with our whole hearts, our whole lives, because You are worthy. Enable us by Your Spirit, we pray. Amen. Amen.

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