



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 4: 7-16

Ephesians

"Church Growth"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Good morning. We are continuing our study in the Book of Ephesians in chapter 4. And last week, if you were here, I think most of you were, we had a review of chapters 1 through 3 which are basically the doctrinal section of the book. Chapters 4 through 6 are what's often called the practical section, the section in which the doctrine is applied to the way we live. And so, we are back. We are in chapter 4 now. When we began our break for the summer, and our series in the Psalms, we broke with verse 6 of chapter 4. You may remember back in May, we concluded with verses 1 through 6 of chapter 4. And so let me just give you a brief review of that because I didn't cover that last week. But as I said, this begins, this practical section of the book, the moving from doctrine to duty. And in that light, Paul says in verse 1: "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Now he's saying, giving you this instruction on the church and what you are as people who have been redeemed by Christ. You were dead. You've been made alive. You've been joined into this church that one new man, and now walk as a new man. Walk as people who are consistent with the calling of grace. Walk is a way of saying live. Conduct yourself in a proper way. And he goes on to describe what that's to be like, in humility and gentleness and reminds them that they are to be united with one another. That's really the way the walk takes place. The walk of a church is to be seen in its unity. Unity one with another, and so he says that they are, in verse 3, to preserve the unity of the spirit. And the reason that we are to do that is because, as he says in verse

4, there is one body and one Spirit. We're joined together, and we're to walk, we're to live in that way with one another.

Well, that brings us to verse 7, and now he's going to tell us how we're able to do that, how we're able to walk in unity. Because when you think about it, that's really an impossible task. We're basically in the flesh selfish people. We want to do things our way. Unity involves submission to one another. It involves ministering to one another. How do we do that? Paul's going to explain that in verses 7 through 16.

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Now explains how Christ got those gifts with which He has given to us.

Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."

Paul is quoting Psalm 68 as his proof text, and that is verse 18 of Psalm 68. And if you will turn over to that passage in the psalms and look at the verse he is quoting, you'll see that there is a difference in what Paul writes in Ephesians 4 verse 8 and what the psalmist writes in Psalm 68 and verse 18. The psalm reads: "Thou hast ascended on high. Thou hast led captive Thy captives. Thou hast received gifts among men." Now, Paul writes that He gave gifts to men, but the psalmist says that the Lord received gifts from men.

So, how do we explain this difference in the texts? Well, some have tried to explain it as a deliberate alteration on the part of the apostle to suit his purpose. I think that's an unjustified conclusion, though. There are ancient versions that translate that psalm the way Paul translates it in Ephesians 4 in an Aramaic and Assyriac texts do that. There's justification for that because the word received in the Hebrew text can have a different meaning. It can mean brought. For example, in Genesis chapter 27 and verse 14 where Rebecca instructs Jacob to go get two lambs and she will then kill those lambs and make stew out of it, and he will then take that stew into Isaac, his father, and a deception will be carried out. It says that Jacob did that and brought them to her. And so, the idea of that verse could mean brought gifts. That seems to have been an interpretation that was current in Paul's day. It's a legitimate one. And the explanation for the difference in Paul's citation in Ephesians 4 and that of the psalm may be that Paul had a translation before him which reflected this point, with translation that we have in front of us. Either way, the point is the same. Even if we

take it as received gifts, He received those gifts, the Lord did in the psalm that speaks of his conquest of the enemy and the spoils of victory. He obtained those spoils of victory, obtained those gifts in order to give them to His people. I think the King James Version reflects that. If I'm not mistaken, its translation is "received gifts for men."

That's the idea, and that's the point that Paul makes here in quoting the psalm. I think that's the explanation. It's very likely Paul had a translation before him, a text that reads according to the translation we have in Ephesians 4:8.

Well, he continues and he draws an inference from the psalm about Christ ascending victorious. He says:

(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so 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 – these are some of the gifts, the spoils of victory that the conquering king has given to his people. Now he gives the reason for the giving of those gifts. Verse 12: 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 of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 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.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we thank You for the privilege that we have to come together again this morning and study and look into this great Book of Ephesians. And this morning, to consider the ministry of service that You

have given to each and every one of us and how You have equipped us to carry out the service that You have called us to perform. And so Father, we pray that You would give us ears to hear and that we'd be very attentive to Your word, and that we would consider very carefully the responsibility that You have given to each and every one of us. And, the gift that You have supplied each and every one of us at the great cost of the sacrifice of Your own Son. We thank You for Him. We thank You for His death, and pray that all we would do would be done not simply out of a sense of duty, which we certainly have. But, out of a sense of deep gratitude that comes from knowing what You have done for us. We are unworthy people. We acknowledge that, Father. Paul teaches that very clearly in chapter 2 of this great epistle. And yet, grace is just for the unworthy, and we thank You that You have shed so much of it in this world and upon each and every one of us individually. We thank You for Your grace. We pray that we would live in light of it, and pray that our time of study this morning would be to that end.

But Father, we also pray for those with special needs. We think of the sick. We pray for them and those who will be facing difficult procedures. We pray for Bob Music particularly, the surgery that he will be undergoing soon. We commit him to Your care. Bless the doctors who will attend to him. Bless the nurses. May all that he undergoes go very well and successfully. I think of Lois Neel's mother at this time as well and pray that You would give special grace to her and healing grace. Commit her to You, and others, Father. We pray for those who are unemployed. We pray that You'd give encouragement to them and open opportunities to them. Father, we thank You that You have, even as we might recount difficulties and special needs, we thank You for the great blessings that You have given to every one of us. We receive much from You, Father. Every breath that we take, every beat of our heart is a gift from You. Thank You, Father. Thank You for the opportunities and the privileges You have given us to serve You and serve Your people. And in so doing, laid up eternal treasures in heaven.

So, we pray Father You'd bless our time of study now. We pray that You would bless us as we sing our final hymn, that it might be a good preparation of our hearts for our study together. Bless us again as we return this evening. Bless the ministry that will take place and the worship that we will give to You. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] In my front yard are some trees that are in sad shape. There's a lot of dead wood in them that needs to be cut out. In fact, it's not unusual for men who do that kind of work to stop by and knock on the door and offer to do the job for me, and it does need to get done, and so probably in the next few weeks we'll have our trees pruned and trimmed and cut out all of the useless limbs and chutes because it's unsightly and it's not healthy for the tree.

Well, it's the same in the churches. They can be a lot like trees and unfortunately have some dead wood. Some Christians are content to sit through a sermon, leave, and never really enter into the life of the church, never become close to the other members. You hear me say that and you might wonder, "Well, do we have any people in this church that are like that?" Well, in all candor and fairness, I think that it's probably true to some extent of each and every one of us. We're inclined to do that. We're inclined to sit, and we're inclined to leave and never really enter into the life of the church.

But that's not God's design for the church. Every believer in Jesus Christ has been called by God and joined to His church. God has not simply called us to Himself, but He has also called us to one another, just like branches in a tree. He has placed us in union with one another in Christ. We are joined together, and we are to live together in a vital, active, fruit-bearing relationship with one another.

Now, Paul makes that very clear in Ephesians chapter 4 in verses 3 and 4 he describes the church as one body and he urges us as Christians in this one body to preserve that unity that we have.

But we're also to grow as a church. Not necessarily grow in numbers, but grow in maturity, grow in vitality. That involves doing the work of God. Paul explains how that happens in our passage this morning, how the church grows and how it is that we are able to carry out the mission that God has given to us.

We're all involved in the mission of the church. He has commissioned us all to do that. Now he will explain how we can do that, how we can preserve our unity and grow in maturity. In verse 7, Paul states that God has given to us each gifts and abilities which we are to use in His service. But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. The grace that Paul speaks of here is not saving grace but enabling grace. He's speaking to men and women who are saved and

who have received that saving grace, but this is something more. This refers to spiritual gifts. This refers to the ability to use those gifts. A spiritual gift is not a natural gift. It's not a natural ability. It is a super natural ability that God gives to His people upon faith.

There are two things to notice here, and the first is a gift is given to each one. Every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift. Every Christian has been equipped by Jesus Christ to serve God. And secondly, we don't all have the same gift or the same number of gifts or the same amount of gift. Gifts are given in differing degrees in different measures according to Christ's sovereign will, according to His wisdom, according to His purpose, as Paul says, according to the measure of Christ's gift.

That being so, we all have a ministry of some kind to perform, a task to do in building up the church. This is what Paul develops in the rest of the passage. He begins in verse 8 by explaining the origin of the gifts that we have, how it is that Christ obtained them for us. And to do that, he quotes the psalms. He quotes Psalm 68 verse 8. Therefore, it says, when He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.

The imagery of the psalm is drawn from the custom of ancient kings, returning triumphantly from battle. They would celebrate their victory with a parade through the city. The citizens would line the streets as the king led his army displaying the spoils of victory and leading the captives chained to his chariot. Then, when the procession ended, the king would distribute to his soldiers and the citizens the gifts of the spoils that he had taken in battle.

They have some examples of that in the Old Testament. Abraham, for example, after he defeated the four kings of the east in Genesis chapter 14 gave the spoils of his victory to his retainers, to the allies, the men who had fought with him and kept none for himself but gave them to those with whom he had fought, who had helped him. His associates. David did the same after some of his victories. You see one example of that in 1 Samuel 30 verses 26 through 31.

So, this is the imagery that the Psalm picks up. And in describing God's victory over Israel's enemies, He's pictured as triumphantly returning to Jerusalem. And in triumph, ascending Mount Zion, leading His captive enemy in a victory procession, and carrying the spoils of battle with Him, which He then gives as gifts.

In that scene, in this psalm, Paul recognizes Christ's triumphant return to heaven. Laid them down with spiritual treasures following His victory over sin and Satan and death. Now enthroned in heaven, He is giving gifts to His people on earth, blessings of eternal life, a gift of the Holy Spirit, and spiritual gifts. That's how Paul applies the psalm to our Lord in verses 9 and 10.

Now, this expression, He ascended, what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth. Paul draws an inference from the psalm, and the point that he makes is the fact that Christ ascended to heaven, ascended victoriously, implies that He had previously descended from heaven when He entered this world through the incarnation. That is, when He became a man. Paul is saying that, or he's saying at least that.

Now, others have seen more in his statement than that and interpret the statement into the lower parts of the earth as referring either to the grave, or to hades itself. You may be familiar with Peter's statement in 1 Peter 3:19 where he does state that at His death, Christ, in the Spirit, made proclamation to the spirits now imprisoned, and there's, that probably should be read in light of Jude 6 where Jude writes of the rebellious angels that are kept in eternal bonds of darkness, presently. Christ went and made a proclamation to them, sometime after His death. It was a proclamation of victory. He had achieved a victory in the cross over the powers of Satan.

Many of the church fathers understood Paul's words here in Ephesians to be that decent into hades. That's a popular position even today, but that doesn't seem to be Paul's meaning here. First, because Psalm 68 doesn't mention that dissent, a dissent into hades, and also because that is not how Christ gained the victory, or our blessings. That occurred through His incarnation. His incarnation involved a great humiliation, and that may be the sense of this coming down to the lower parts of the earth. That speaks of the great humiliation that Christ endured and experienced in becoming a man and becoming a servant because when He did that, He set aside the independent use of His divine attributes and voluntarily submitted the exercise of them to the Father's will. He became a man. And as man, He became a perfectly obedient man. In fact, His obedience was to the point of death itself. So He suffered great humiliation. He suffered the cross, but that's how He won the victory and how He gained the spoils of victory. And as a result, God highly exalted Him, raised Him

from the grave to the highest glory, far above all the heavens, Paul says. And there, He sits enthroned as king, filling all things, the entire universe, with His spiritual presence as ruler and redeemer. And as the conquering king, the king who is now seated upon His throne at His Father's right hand, He has bestowed gifts on His people, He has given to them the spoils of victory. He has given to us His church, spiritual gifts.

Those gifts are listed in four chapters of the New Testament, in Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12. And then, in 1 Peter 4 verse 11 and Ephesians 4:11. So you can remember the spiritual gifts by 12 and 4, two chapters of 12 and two chapters with chapter 4. Here in our passage, Paul gives special attention to four gifts. Verse 11. "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." The first two gifts, apostles and prophets, have been called foundational gifts because in chapter 2 and verse 20, Paul states that the church has been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus, himself being a cornerstone. And so apostles and prophets are foundation gifts, the foundation of the church. The apostles were their authoritative founders of the church, and to carry out that mission of establishing the church and establishing churches throughout the ancient world. They had special power to perform miracles.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of that in 2 Corinthians 12 and verse 12 where he records that the signs of a true apostle are performed among them by signs and wonders and miracles. Miracles were their credentials for the message that they were preaching, which was a message completely different from anything they had heard in the Gentile world. They preached this message. They performed miracles that verifies the truth of their message.

Chapter 3 and verse 5, Paul identifies both the apostles and prophets as the agents of revelation. God spoke to the church through the prophets. He gave revelation to the church through the prophets. And in so doing, He gave the church guidance and He gave the early church stability. You can see how necessary prophets would have been during that period in the 1st century before the New Testament had been completed when they did not have the written Word of God before them. God communicated to His people and gave instruction through prophetic utterances.

Neither of these gifts of apostles and teachers continued beyond the apostolic age. With the completion of the canon of the New Testament, prophets ceased, revelation came to a conclusion, and with the establishment of the church, the apostles ceased.

That's debated by some today. We don't have time to go through that debate in any length, but it's the fact that the statement that I make, that these have ceased, is certainly, I think, suggested by the fact that the apostles and prophets are called the foundation of the church. A foundation is limited to the initial stages of development. It doesn't continue beyond the initial stages, and so we would not want to, we would think at least it would seem to be suggested from the fact that they are the foundation of the church, that they have not gone beyond that, that they have ceased. But I think it's also a reasonable inference from the qualification of an apostle, which is that an apostle be a man who had witnessed the Lord's resurrection glory.

That was one of the requirements that the apostles listed in Acts chapter 1 verse 22 when they were seeking a replacement for Judas. And in 1 Corinthians 9 verse 1, Paul affirms his apostleship to the Corinthians. It was always under question. He was frequently dealing with this challenge to his authority. Men were saying hey, this isn't a true apostle. He's not one of the twelve. That would undermine his authority and the authority of his letters. He was constantly having to defend that. You see that in the Book of Galatians, one of the first books that he wrote. And you see it here. You see it with the Corinthians when he had to defend his apostleship with them. And so he says to them in 1 Corinthians 9:1, "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" That confirms that he is an apostle. He had witnessed the resurrected Lord, saw Him in His glory on the Damascus road when Christ appeared to him.

Well, such witnesses were restricted to the first generation of the church. They have not continued. So, these gifts of apostleship and prophets were foundational. They have not continued to this day and not go beyond the apostolic age. But the second group of gifts continues in every generation, that of evangelists and pastors and teachers. Evangelists are men who have a special ability to make the gospel clear and relevant to unbelievers. Often, they were traveling missionaries. Philip was an evangelist in Acts 8. It is recorded that he took the gospel from Jerusalem north to Samaria. And there, a great revival occurred. He preached to large groups of people

and large groups of people came to faith. Then, in the midst of that, in the midst of that great revival, suddenly the Spirit leads him away from that, away from those great crowds down south to Gaza on the way to Egypt. And there, he meets an Ethiopian unit, climbs up into the chariot with him, a man who'd been studying the Book of Isaiah and was puzzling over some things. Philip explains it to him. The man comes to faith and is baptized.

So, from the example of Philip, it can be said that an evangelist may have skill in speaking to large crowds as Philip did when he was in Samaria. But, it may also be that he is one who speaks to small crowds or speaks to individuals, as Philip did when he spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch. In other words, evangelism can take place in a variety of ways. It can take place in the ways we normally think of it, I guess, when we think of Billy Graham, a man greatly gifted by God to preach the gospel to large crowds of people. It also takes place when one of you simply sits down with a person, gives them the gospel in a personal way.

Evangelism can occur in the church. That's where George Whitfield and John Wesley were preaching when the Great Awakening began in the 18th century in England, and also here in America. They were preaching in the churches, in churches that were dead. They began to preach the gospel. People began to fill those churches. People came to faith in those churches, and the crowds became so great that eventually they had to go out into the open fields. But evangelism can take place in the church, it can take place at the office, it can take place in the neighborhood. There are all kinds of ways and all kinds of places to exercise the gifts.

Timothy may or may not have had the gift of evangelism, but in 2 Timothy 4, Paul urges him to do the work of an evangelist. We are all to do the work of an evangelist. But there are some to whom God has specially gifted, given special gifts to do that, gifts with authority and effectiveness in evangelism. We're all to do it, but some men, some women have a special ability that God has given to them.

Finally, Paul lists pastors and teachers. It's really two aspects of one gift. The single gift of pastor-teacher. The grammar indicates that. In the Greek text, each of the gifts that are listed here has the definite article, the, which isn't translated in our versions of this text, but if we were to read it literally, it would be, and He gave some as the apostles, and some as the prophets, and some as the evangelists, and some as the pastors and teachers. So, there's an article before each of these gifts, but when you

come to pastors and teachers, there's only one article which binds the two together and makes them a single gift, two aspects of the same gifts. Charles Hodge made this observation. He writes, "There is no evidence in Scripture that there was a set of men authorized to teach but not authorized to exhort. One function includes the other." I think that's Paul's point. This one gift is the gift of pastor-teacher. What the pastor-teacher does is he explains the Scriptures. He unfolds the meaning of the text. And based upon that, based upon the meaning of the text, he gives exhortation. So he gives instruction and guidance. He differs from the evangelist in that his ministry is generally more localized than the evangelist. The evangelist goes throughout the city, throughout the nation, throughout the world preaching the gospel. The pastor-teacher is generally in one place, in a local church. He differs from a prophet in that the prophet gives revelation, whereas the teacher explains revelation.

Now, this list is an abbreviated one, as I mentioned earlier. There are two major passages which lists spiritual gifts. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. And there are various ways to classify the gifts. But in 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 11, Peter seems to classify them into speaking gifts, and service gifts. He writes, "Whoever speaks, let him speak as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so by the strength which God supplies." So speaking gifts and service gifts. Speaking gifts would include the gifts of teaching and evangelism, but also the gift of exhortation, which is listed in Romans 12 and verse 8, which is a gift of giving wise counsel and guidance. Barnabas probably had this gift. His name means "son of encouragement," and we see him living up to his name shortly after Paul's conversion. When Paul, or at the time, he was known as Saul, came to Jerusalem, everyone there within the church was afraid to associate with him. He'd been a violent persecutor of the church, and now he's claiming to be a Christian, and they were very wary about any contact with him. But Barnabas befriended him and he introduced Paul to the apostles. Had a very significant ministry in Paul's life. But also, after Mark's failure as a missionary, Barnabas took him under his wing and encouraged him, and was evidently very effective in helping Mark recover, because Mark became very useful in the ministry and very useful to the apostle Paul.

Discouragement is one of Satan's most effective means of undermining the Christian's spiritual life and service, and so encouragement , exhortation, is a vital part of the ministry. It helps to overcome the discouragement that Satan can sow. Service

gifts would include the gifts of helps, the gift of service, doing the work of a church that is out of the limelight, but is very important to the function of a church, many of the deacons have that gift. They serve, they do things like open up the church in the morning, and close it down, and turn out the lights, and make sure the air conditioner, the heater's working correctly, and all these things that we don't pay much attention to, but are very important to the function of the church.

There's also the gift of giving, another service gift, the special capacity to give out of one's substance, to support the work of the ministry, a gift of mercy, caring for the ill, the bereaved, the handicapped. Now, you go through these and you realize, well, I need to be giving, too, and I need to be caring for the sick, and that's true. We all need to be practicing these to some extent, but some have a greater ability to do it than others. They have been specially gifted for that.

So, in a sense, all of the gifts are service gifts that we need to be exercising, because all of the gifts, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 verse 7 are for the common good. That's why God has given us a gift. It is for the common good. No gift has been given, whether it be teaching, evangelism, or the gift of helps, the gift of mercy, the gift of giving. None of those have been given for personal or selfish use but for the purpose of edifying the church.

And so, there are other ways of classifying the gifts. Some classify them as utterance gifts or non-utterance gifts. The gift of teaching, as opposed to the gift of helps. Or, temporary gifts as opposed to permanent gifts, the gift of tongues as opposed to evangelism. Various ways to classify the gifts and there are many other gifts that we don't have time to touch on. Some maintain that there are at least 20 spiritual gifts, and each of us has been given at least one. Maybe more, but at least one, verse 7, to each one of us, grace was given.

But Paul is not concerned here to give a complete list. He gives the four that were fundamental to the growth of the church. And what is characteristic of all four is teaching, is instruction, and this is the principal means of building upon the church. There is nothing more necessary for the growth of a church than teaching, than instruction. We cannot develop without it.

That's what Paul indicates in verse 12 where he states the reason why God gave these teaching gifts, these gifts of instruction, to the church. It was for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of

Christ. This is a very important verse for understanding the church and the ministry of the church because it shows that the ministry is not the work of one man. It's not the work of the pastor of the church. It is the work of the entire church, and John Stott has brought that out very well in making some comparisons with the traditional models that we sometimes have of the church. He has pointed out that this statement, this verse that Paul writes here, verse 12, undermines these traditional ideas that people have of church, modeled after a pyramid, "with one man, a pastor, perched as he writes, precariously on its pinnacle like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority."

Many churches are structured like that. There's one man on top of everything. Everyone else is sort of inferior to that one leader who behaves something like a pope. It's an unbiblical image, as he points out. As is the model of a bus in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are passengers, slumbering in peaceful security behind him.

The New Testament doesn't support the idea of a single pastor, nor the office of pastor, nor of a passive congregation. It teaches plurality of leadership and oversight. And as John Stott calls it, an every member ministry. The correct model for the church is that of a body. As one of Paul's favorite illustrations of the church, because like a body that has many members, hands, eyes, feet, ears, the church too has many members and many tasks and responsibilities. And gifted teachers and evangelists have been given to the church so that each member will be adequately equipped to use his or her gift and minister to one another.

The word "equipping" that Paul uses here, or perfecting, according to the Authorized Version, comes from the word that's used in the gospels for mending fishing nets. In Galatians 6 and verse 1, it's used of restoring a person who has fallen in sin. It's actually a medical term that was used of setting a broken bone. And so, the idea here of equipping the saints is that of fixing flaws, strengthening character, making a person useful in his or her life in this world, which is filled with challenges and hostility, and making us fit for that, fit for the challenge, and giving us a certain fitness and ability to serve the Lord, serve one another. A work of pastoring and teaching is particularly helpful in doing that, in giving understanding, giving perspective and direction to Christians through the instruction of God's word so that we will be fit for service.

What is very clear from what Paul is saying here is that all of us have a ministry. Not just one man. Every one of you has a calling, has a ministry, and we need each other. We need each other in the body of Christ, just like a physical body needs every one of its members and needs them functioning properly and well. That's the way the church functions effectively, when all of the members are carrying out their responsibilities and exercising their gifts, that's how we carry out the mission that Christ has given to the church, which is to evangelize the world and make disciples.

And, so, we all have our part to play. There's an urgency about this, an urgency about each of us playing our part, carrying out our responsibilities. Because as Paul will go on to tell us in chapter 6 of this book, we are in the midst of a spiritual battle, and that battle is constant, and it constantly rages around us. We may not see it, we may not feel it, but it is constantly going on. And there may be no better way to illustrate the importance of each of us playing his or her part in the every member ministry, than that of a military campaign. Paul does use the idea of a soldier and a battle later on, and that I think is very helpful for us in understanding the importance of each and every one of us doing what we have been called to do. You think of a great campaign, such as the invasion of Normandy and World War II and you get a sense of what we are to be doing and how we are to be doing it. Because it didn't succeed by one great force of soldiers carrying their rifles and taking the beaches. It took many different men in many different capacities to accomplish that mission. The man carrying the rifle had to be backed by the whole army. Before a GI could land on the beach, he had to be supported by artillery and air cover. When he had many who upon landing on the beach, he had to be supplied with food and ammunition and fuel which involved ships and crews and then trucks, which delivered the supplies to the forward position. It took a lot of people doing a lot of different things to make it work. Some on the front lines and some at the rear. Some doing heroic things and others doing mundane things. But all were necessary, and it's the same in the church. It has an inner relationship of support, and Christ has given each of us a gift to contribute to that support for the work of service, as Paul says.

And so, we all have our part to play, and the purpose of the teaching gifts, these gifts of instruction, is to equip the members of the church to do that. It's interesting, is it not? Paul doesn't say, and to do all of this, God established

seminaries. God established Bible colleges. Nothing wrong with those. They're good. They're helpful. I'm glad I attended a seminary. But, you wonder: since it is the church that's to be doing this, do we not have seminaries, do we not have Bible colleges perhaps because the church has not done the job that it should do? You don't need to go to a seminary to be equipped, to minister to God's people and to proclaim the Word of God and the gospel throughout this world. You do need to be a vital member of a church, though. You need to be studying God's word with His saints, with his people, and ministering to them. That's how we're adequately equipped. God does that through the gifts He has given in the church. And when it's done, the result, he points out in verses 13 and 14, is unity. The building up of the body of Christ until, he writes, we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Unity and maturity go together. We reach maturity as a church through unity, through a mutual concern for one another and a ministry to one another. And Paul develops the importance of this in the final verses. Without maturity, we are like children, undiscerning, unstable, easily influenced. It's not a criticism of children. It's part of being a child. Children are impressionable. They are susceptible to fads and fashions. They always want the newest thing. That's where we all begin. We all start out like children, and that's just characteristic of children, but we are to be progressing and growing out of childhood into adulthood. And when we don't do that, the problem becomes not being child-like, becoming childish.

Christians can be childish. Paul describes it as being carried about by every wind of doctrine, intrigued by every spiritual fad, vulnerable to wolves, continually pulled off-course. One writer has put it this way: "Christians are warned not to be babies in an open boat at the mercy of wind and wave, driven off-course by the roll of the dice." That's the way Christians are when they are childish, when they are immature, when they're not growing. The mature Christian, on the other hand, is steady, discerning. He or she has knowledge, has understanding, has truth, understands it and promotes that truth, promotes that understanding in the church to help others develop and grow.

Paul encourages that in verse 15. He says, "But," and that indicates that there is another course from that of being blown about. But rather than being carried about,

we are to be a people who are, he says, "speaking the truth in love." Literally, that is trothing in love. The word, or expression, speaking the truth, is a participle. The verb is translated, being truthful. And so the meaning may be broader than simply speaking the truth. That's part of it, if course, but the idea may be broader and include action so that the idea of what Paul is saying here, is not only speaking the truth, but doing the truth, and doing it in love. It's as we do it, speak it, do it in love that the Holy Spirit changes us, that He gives growth to a church, and He brings it to maturity. We grow from childlikeness to Christ-likeness.

Paul says that we grow up in all aspects into Him. That is, into Christ, who is the head. So again, Paul is using this image of the body to describe the church. It's living and growing. It's not a static thing, but it is a living thing. And here, he says it is growing up into the head. That's a difficult picture to imagine, but as various commentators have pointed out and as we all know, a baby's head is much larger in proportion to its body than the head of a grownup person is to his or her body. And so, the idea of growing up into the head means bringing the body into right proportions with the head. The church is to be doing that. It's to be growing into the right proportion to Christ, developing, maturing, becoming like Him.

Verse 16, Paul says that the growth, the life comes from Christ. It comes from the head from whom the whole body is being fitted and held together. Now, that's a present, ongoing process. It never stops. We are presently being fitted. We are presently being held together. We are constantly growing, and that growth comes from Christ. So, we are to look to Him. We're to constantly be looking to Him, through study, through prayer, fellowship with Him. Our growth as a church depends on Christ. But, it occurs through our union with one another. We are described here as joints that are fitted together. We are every joint of supply, as Paul puts it. We are all connected to one another, and are to be supplying one another with Christ's grace. He supplies that to His church through the exercise of our gifts. We can add to that also our mutual assistance to one another.

As each member does that, ministers to one another, the church functions as a coordinated body. It becomes very effective in its ministry. So, the church grows through your participation, through instruction from God's word, through a response to God's word, through speaking the truth and doing the truth in love, through active service to one another.

We could fill this auditorium to overflowing, and if all we had was a building that was filled with people who listen to sermons and then left unchanged, unobedient, uncaring, we would have nothing but dead wood. It might be impressive to us, but it would not be impressive to the Lord God. It would be a church of Laodiceans. God hates that, and eventually, Christ would spit us out of His mouth. God's design for the church is an every member ministry. He has given each of us the task of the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. He has given us grace with which to do that. He's given us a gift. So we need to be doing that.

So you need to ask yourself: am I doing that? Is that something I desire to do? Then ask yourself well, the natural question to ask is: how do I do that? How can I begin to undertake this responsibility that God has given to me, and really be a part of the life of this church, an every member ministry, and contribute to that? Well, I think, very simply, you just start by studying the Word of God, studying the Scriptures and listening to His word. And in praying about it. It begins with a personal response. Everything that is good within the church begins with a personal response. It begins with you and with me getting down on our knees in the privacy of our home and asking God to change us, to give us a pure heart, to give us direction, make us useful servants for Him. And then get to know people in the church. Pray for those people that you get to know. Pray for their concerns and their needs. Make an effort to get to know people.

It sometimes is the case that it's the new people in the church that really have the vitality, whereas the older members, well, they've done that and they've begun to kind of sit back on their laurels, begin to take it easy. We're never in a position where we can do that. The older members of this congregation need to be reaching out to the younger ones, the newer ones. We need to be joining together, becoming more involved with one another and using our gifts, praying for one another, showing a concern. That's what we're to be doing. That's the burden of this passage. Paul is telling that church of Ephesus that it needs to be involved in the ministry of that church. That's how it grows. That's how it becomes a vital church, through its response to the Word of God. And so may God help each of us, every one of us, to see our responsibility to the Lord and our responsibility to His people, and act upon it.

But if you're here this morning without Christ, if you don't know Him as your Savior, then you are without the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal life, the gift of

the forgiveness of sins. You can do but one thing: look to Christ. Believe in Him who has won the victory over sin, over Satan, over death. He won that victory on the cross. But He did not stay in that condition. He did not remain in the grave because He rose triumphant over death, and He ascended to heaven where He sits enthroned, guiding and blessing His people at this very moment.

When the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was a young boy, and unconverted, he was forced into a primitive Methodist church one Sunday morning by a blinding snowstorm. There, he heard a very simple sermon by a simple man. The main minister had been snowed out himself, and so this simple layman, a man who was rather ignorant, got up and did his best to expound the Scriptures. Took a passage from Isaiah, spoke for maybe five or ten minutes, and that's about all he could say. But he noticed this young Charles sitting there, a stranger to the church, and he fixed his eyes upon him, and he said, "Look to Jesus Christ. Look, look, look. You have nothing to do but look and live." That's what Spurgeon did, and he came to faith there in that primitive Methodist church.

If you're here this morning without Christ, then look to Him. Trust in Him. Come to know Him. And you who have believed, look to Him to give you the strength to use the gift that He has given. He has supplied you with an abundance of grace. Use it in His service. We all do that. Shall we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we consider this passage and we are reminded of all that You have given to us. You have blessed us abundantly. Paul has already spoken of that, of the treasures that we have, the riches that we have in Christ. We're reminded here that we have been given grace. We have been given gifts, and they have been obtained for us at the great price of Your Son's blood, through His death. And so, it's very clear, Father, that You are very, very concerned and interested that we use that gift that You have given to us, that has been purchased at such a great cost. May we become very sensitive to that, and may we become a people, men and women and Young people who have an earnest desire to serve You and serve Your people. We look to You to move us in that direction, to fill us with that desire and that concern. We pray You'd do that. Bless this assembly, that it would continue to grow and be vital. Thank You for all that are here. Everyone whom You have brought to Yourself, and what You have given to them and what

they have given to this assembly. And father we pray for those who may be here who don't know Christ, we pray that You bring them to a conviction of sin. Move them to look to Christ and trust only in Him. It's in His name we pray. Amen.