

Four Means God Uses to Produce Personal and Corporate Church Growth - Part 2

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[0:00] Just a privilege again to be here with you and just to get to open up God's Word together with you. It's always a privilege and just to be able to do that in another body once again with other believers that we have that unity of the faith with is just so sweet.

So as we approach the text this morning, I'd like you to think back just for a minute at some of the key moments in your Christian life where the Lord has grown you. Whether that was a growth in some Christ-like virtue or perhaps there was a key victory in some battle with an easily entangling sin or maybe an area of biblical convictions that was fortified for you.

What was it that the Lord used to bring about that increased Christ-likeness or that victory or those convictions? No doubt there are a number of instruments the Lord used that worked together to bring that about.

And from what the scriptures say, I can make a good guess at some of them. Probably there was some truth or truths from the Word of God that you understood more clearly or trusted in with more faith.

Likely there was someone or maybe several someones who communicated that truth to you in a way that you understood or in a way that encouraged your faith.

[1:29] And in our text we're going to see all of those tools of growth explained and how Christ uses them to grow us not only as individual Christians but also as a corporate body even as Kaylin was praying about earlier.

So again, as you mentioned, this is a part two. So if you weren't here last week, then you should go back and listen to that for the first couple points. We'll be picking up in Ephesians 4, 11 to 16 and really dive into the second half of this text.

And as we saw together last week, this text could really be summarized as four means by which the church grows. Four means by which the church grows.

In other words, God has revealed that it's through these four ways that he will grow his church. Both as a corporate body and as us as individual members of it.

And because these are means that God has revealed for us to grow, those are then things that are our responsibilities to pursue diligently so that we then can grow.

[2:33] And last week we dove into the first two of these means. First was Christ's hard-won equipping gifts. How through his humble descent to save his people and then his ascent into glory, he had won the authority to give gifted men to the church.

In order to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. And since that's the first tool, that's really the ones that kind of sets in motion the other three means and allows those ones to operate on all cylinders.

The second means we unpacked was the saint's persistent servant work. The task that you as a saint, are trained and equipped to do is not easy and not glamorous and not about yourself.

We saw that last week. It's a work of service and it results in the building up or the edification of the body of Christ. This work of service then must be persisted in until the job of building up is done, which does not happen until everyone outwardly associated with the local church becomes truly united with Christ in faith and united with the rest of the body in faith in Christ and until everyone is brought to a full spiritual maturity of the likeness of Christ.

This reality then needs to shape how we approach relationships in the church and to make diligent use of our pastors and teachers for the reason that Christ gave them, which is for our equipping to then do that work.

[4:01] Now this week is exciting because we get to dive into the real nuts and bolts of, okay, how does this actually work? How does equipping actually happen? How does this work of service, what actually is that work?

What do you do? So our third means by which the church grows is going to bring us right into that with means number three, everyone's loving expression of truth.

Everyone's loving expression of truth. This is going to be in 14 and 15, but I'll pick up the text where we started in verse 11 of Ephesians 4.

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 of the full knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

So that 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, that is Christ, from whom the whole body, being joined and held together by what every joint supplies according to the properly measured working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

[5:31] So we saw here that the purpose of the saints' work of service, which is in verses 12 and 13, is that we may no longer be undiscerning infants in verse 14, but instead in verse 15 to grow up into Christ, and that happens by speaking the truth in love.

So I emphasize the so that. This is the purpose. This is the purpose of our saints' work of service. Now, this term in saying that we might no longer be children, in verse 14, Paul is implying here that our default state is childish.

Our default state is to be children. And the term here refers not just to children generally, but to very small children, even infants. And infants, they don't know much.

They come out and they know nothing. They are by nature gullible and ready to believe anything because they lack the experience and the tested convictions to filter right from wrong.

They don't know. You parents know this well. And I'm a new parent. We have a four-month-old. And so this lesson is very fresh for me. She knows nothing and doesn't know yet what's good and what's bad.

[6:41] She's beginning to learn, ah, milk, that's good. You know, other things that taste bad. So she's starting to learn, but she still knows next to nothing. And just about anything that's within reach is liable to wind up in her mouth because she's undiscerning.

She doesn't know. And as she grows in her ability to understand communication, there's going to be more areas of vulnerability that are going to open up. She's going to actually become more vulnerable before she hopefully matures to become less vulnerable.

Now for us, the specific area that Paul identifies as immature vulnerability is towards incorrect teaching. What characterize immature believers is that they are tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind.

So the first of these terms here refers to being storm-tossed and metaphorically could use to be thrown into confusion. And the second means to be carried here or there and even could take the sense of being dizzy or being dizzied by something.

So we might say that an immature Christian is easily moved in his doctrinal moorings. Even if he does not actually adopt an erroneous teaching, he may be confused and dizzied by the burundering variety of teachings and doctrines that are out there.

[7:59] They come upon him like wave after wave. And just like a small ship can be buffeted in a large storm and tossed here and there by the waves, driven by the wind, it's not going where the pilot is wanting to direct the ship.

It's going wherever the waves and the wind send it. Even so, that's how the immature Christian is pictured in the whole arena of incorrect teaching, false teaching, even just incorrect views that come at you constantly.

Now what buffets this immature believer is described in three ways. There are three things. You see that preposition by. Three things that do this.

First we have by every wind of doctrine. This refers to any passing teaching that may catch the attention of the immature Christian.

Just like, again, a little baby. They're pretty easily distracted. You know, something flashy, shiny, noisy pops up. They look over there and, oh, what's that? You know, the immature Christian is like that.

[9:05] You know, any new teaching that seems flashy and interesting and makes a loud noise, they turn and they look, oh, what's that over there? The trickery of men, next, is literally the dice playing of men.

And apparently it seems to have the idea of playing with loaded dice. The idea is here that the people that are bringing this teaching are making it look like they're dealing fairly with the text of Scripture.

They make it look like, hey, we're saying just what the text says, but in reality there's loaded dice going on. It's like playing at a casino where they got loaded dice. The house always wins.

And so here it's like you're listening to this teaching. It looks like, hey, this is fair. This is on the up and up. This is great teaching. But they actually are subtly shifting it and twisting it to fit their own desires.

Craftiness in deceitful scheming is a little bit difficult to understand what Paul is saying there precisely, but the phrase indicates wisdom and skill that's been bent into the service of deception.

[10:16] Wisdom and skill bent into the service of deception. And this wisdom then devises effective methods to make that falsehood appear acceptable. So really by adding these three terms on, Paul's emphasizing here that this blinding deceptiveness of incorrect teaching, and it's even enhanced by the great skill and subtlety and wisdom even that's employed in trying to purvey this incorrect teaching.

And as a result, what he's trying to get at is that we are vulnerable. I am vulnerable. You are vulnerable. Childish gullibility is the natural state. And Paul even includes himself amazingly in this category of vulnerability.

He says, until we are no longer children. So Paul recognized that he, without the church around him, was vulnerable to being buffeted by this teaching.

So the question that you must ask yourself and that I had to ask myself as I wrestled with this text is, do I actually believe what Paul's saying here?

It's easy to think of yourself for all kinds of reasons that you might give as you know the truth. I'm solid on doctrine.

[11:33] For me, oh, a seminary student. I know the truth. You may have been in Christ for many decades and know the truth. And you may have grown up past this vulnerability and grown so that your vulnerability is lessened.

But without the church that's continually growing us, we are still vulnerable. Even Paul acknowledged himself to be included in that category. So certainly we're not exempt.

With the church, however, we can grow up. And verse 15 is going to lay that out. We are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, into Christ.

We already saw last week with the saints' persistent work of service that the goal of growth is always Christ. He is the standard toward which we and everyone around us need to reach and attain to.

No area of your heart and life can be excluded here. We must grow up into Christ in all aspects or in all things. You can't leave some of your life that's not yet Christ-like.

[12:38] We are to mature in everything. And Christ is identified not only as the goal of growth, but also as the head or the authority. He's the, we could say, maybe the energizing source.

And from him comes all the direction for growth and action in the body. But if you jump back to the beginning of verse 15, Paul gives very specifically the means by which we grow up into Christ. And it's given with that ing word at the beginning. But speaking the truth in love. Now we introduced the question last week, how is it that I, just an ordinary Christian, can cause the building up of something so great as the body of Christ?

I'm full of sin myself. I'm immature myself. I fail so much myself and so much weakness that goes along with my sin. How is it that I could do anything to do something so great as building up the church, the bride and body of Christ?

Well, Paul gives the answer here. It is by speaking the truth in love. And actually, this word translated, speaking the truth, is really broader than just a narrow concept of speaking.

[13:57] That's the main idea, because the main thing you do with truth is you speak it. You tell it to others. But this word includes the idea of living in conformity with the truth.

It could even be kind of woodenly translated, truthing in love. We are to truth, to speak the truth, to live the truth, to do the truth in love.

And that's why I titled this, this means everyone's lovingly expressed truth. Everyone's loving expression of truth, because trying to capture that idea that this is not simply spoken truth, but it can be all kinds of ways that we would express truth to one another.

And by saying it is in love, Paul is saying that this speaking and living of the truth cannot just be under whatever we want, but it has to be under the control or under the influence of love.

Our speaking of the truth is to be controlled by love. We must always be asking the question, what would love say? What would love do? What would be, here's the truth, but how do I package it and deliver it and bring it in a way that will be loving?

[15:06] Now, obviously, we need to define love biblically, not sentimentally or culturally. So this does not exclude times when we must rebuke and we must confront. Those things can and must be done in love.

But we cannot miss the fact that truth that grows will be truth in love. Truth that grows will be truth in love. And at this point, we really need to stop and consider just how really stupendous this reality that Paul had just said is.

We, as people in the body, grow those around us by speaking the truth in love. Well, it's a little bit of a simple point if you don't consider it, but what wonderful clarity that is.

You know, we don't just come here to church and do the things because that's what we've always done or do the things because, hey, this works or, hey, we tried this and that worked out pretty well. I did this over here at this other church I've been at in the past.

We don't just do things because, oh, they work, because we like them. We do things because of what God's revealed they do. And here we see that the way we build up others around us is by speaking truth in love.

[16:19] So you see others around us that aren't yet fully like Christ? Well, what do you do? You speak truth in love. You see others around you that have sin battles they're struggling with?

Well, what do you do? You speak truth in love. And on we could go. Well, this is just so clear. And from one angle, this is a little surprising if you think about it.

You know, at my own church, and I know here at Cottonwood as well, we place a very high emphasis on the preached word, and rightly so, because Scripture does as well. And because of that emphasis, it can be assumed that, oh, that's the main way we grow, is the preaching of the word.

And I want to be careful to say that we do indeed grow through the preaching of the word when we believe it by faith. It itself is an expression, hopefully, of speaking truth in love.

But here, what Paul's identifying is not preaching directly that causes the growth, but truth spoken in love in all the myriad ways that that occurs in the life of the church.

[17:24] Preaching has a crucial role because it equips the saints so that they can then have that truth and know that truth and believe that truth to be able to speak it in love to others around them.

And then preaching then has this role that's not directly causing growth, but a strategic role of indirectly causing growth, where when you listen to preaching, you learn truth, and you learn the word.

And then when your friend is in a trial, when your friend is dealing with sin, and when your friend doesn't know what to do in a wisdom issue, you're able to bring that truth in love into their heart. So the fact that the means of maturity is speaking the truth in love is why we can help others mature into Christlikeness, even though we are yet immature ourselves.

The power is not in us, but the power is in the truth when it's received by faith. This marvelous reality is that Christ works through the truth we speak and live in order to grow up His church.

[18:27] That's why if you jump down to verse 29 of this same chapter, Paul commands, Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up.

There's our building up, our edification word. Only such as is good for building up what is needed so that it will give grace to those who hear. And again, what an encouragement this is as we try to speak truth around us that when we speak the needed word, when we speak truth that's in love, it gives grace.

The Lord uses that to give grace to those who hear those words. But don't miss either the burden of responsibility that this places on us in our relationship. And don't forget either the childish vulnerability that we are all susceptible to.

In your relationships at church, whenever you speak truth in love, you help mature those who are around you who are hearing. And conversely, we might say whenever you fail to speak truth in love, you are perpetuating immaturity in both them and yourselves because you're not maturing them by speaking truth in love.

So are your relationships at church marked by the speaking of truth? Or are they filled with most anything else? Sports, job, politics, hobbies, kids, grandkids, whatever.

[19:55] All these things that are good things that aren't wrong to talk about. But if they're not laced with truth and if we're not ultimately getting to where we can speak truth in love, we're actually perpetuating the immaturity of those that we have relationships with.

Too often we talk about those things in a way that fails to lovingly calculate how we could build others up with truth. How does the truth apply to your wonderful relationship with your grandkids? How does the truth apply to your job and the difficulties that you had this week? How does the truth apply even to hobbies or other things that may occupy your time?

And when we don't do this, the result is that our growth slows down and so does the growth of those around us. Now I'll admit, speaking the truth in love is not easy.

There are so many challenges that come in to this. We've probably all been in situations where we were talking to someone and here is an evident spiritual need. It was obvious.

[21:00] Like, wow, this person is burdened. This person has a trial. This person has a sin, whatever it was. The evident spiritual need right in front of us and we wanted more than anything to be able to help, to be able to offer some comfort or encouragement or aid in that situation, but we didn't know what to say.

We didn't have the first idea of what the truth was or we had a garbled idea and we knew it wouldn't come out clearly and so we said nothing. We didn't know the scriptures well enough to be able to know in that moment the specific truth that needed to be applied to that situation.

The solution then to that is to be better equipped and trained in the truth by our shepherds and teachers. This brings us right back to the first means that we talked about of Christ's hard-won equipping gifts.

If we don't know the truth well enough to speak it in love, we need to then learn the truth better and the means Christ has given us to do that is our shepherds and teachers. Now there's a number of other challenges that we could consider, but what's really remarkable is that Paul is going to indirectly address a lot of those in this next means in verse 16.

So we're going to jump right in now to the fourth means the church grows, which is the body's every close-knit relationship. The body's every close-knit relationship in verse 16.

[22:27] Now I have to tell you, this means, as my own personal favorite, because it's the one I least understood before I really dug into this text. I think I had some level of handle on, okay, pastors and teachers, those are who equip me and I got to do this work of service and I need to speak love to other people, but speak truth in love.

But I think this one I really did not understand very well and the verse is a little bit complex, so it can be hard to understand if you're just trying to read it through.

But it can be helpful to think about this means as the context in which speaking truth in love can happen most effectively. This truth kind of sets up the environment in which truth is often spoken in love and can be spoken in love with great effect.

If these things in verse 16 are happening, there will be a lot of effective truthing in love and so growth will happen. But if these things are not present or are present only a little bit, then it's going to be very difficult for truth to be spoken in love.

And as a result, the body will suffer. So like I said, the structure of this verse is a little complicated, but it really contains one main verb, one main idea. And so to help with that, I've put up here on the screen a little bit of the verse that's just rearranged and then a few words that I added in brackets just for clarity so that you can kind of see what it is.

[23:55] So you can see right at the top there that the whole body causes the growth of the body. That's the main sentence, if you will, in this verse. There you can see that all of the other words in this, they just give more information about how this happens.

How does the whole body cause the growth of the body? It's a little broken up, but if you go back to your own Bible, so you can see this, it says, from whom the whole body, and then skip everything else and drop all the way to near the end, causes the growth of the body.

So that's the main idea here. And the first crucial point we might say here is that that's the whole body that causes the growth.

Three times in this one verse, in fact, Paul emphasized this idea of the whole body, every joint, each individual part. No Christian is exempted from the building of the body and no Christian is unnecessary.

No Christian is unimportant in this task. We have already seen that some have been given gifts to the rest of the body because they have strategic importance as pastors and teachers, as evangelists, in building up the others and equipping them to build up the others.

[25 : 09] But no believer is more or less important or more or less indispensable. All are indispensable. None are superfluous. However meager you may think your own gifting to be, what the text says here is that the whole body grows the body.

Paul is clear too that the growth of the body is reciprocal. It's the body growing the body. You as an individual believer don't grow yourself, but you grow others in the body and they grow you.

And so this again is why we need the local church and why it's so crucial to us as believers because we can't grow ourselves, but we can help others grow. And then if we're involved in their lives, they can help us grow.

So digging in then again to what it is that Paul says here about how the body causes the growth of the body, we first see that the origin or cause of the growth is Christ.

It says, from Christ as the head. You and I have no power in ourselves to grow someone else spiritually. We have no ability.

[26 : 15] Zero. There's nothing I can do to help you guys grow in myself. Nothing you can do to help anyone else grow in yourself. But we do have the promise here in God's word that if we pursue these means, growth will come from Christ.

Christ will supply what is needed for the growth. It is from him. You can probably look back in key moments, as I had said earlier, about your own maturing as a Christian. See how God used truth spoken or lived out in love.

And these particular people that did that, God used that to grow you. But don't stop at them. Look beyond them and see that it was Christ using them to grow you that ultimately brought about that growth.

He is the head and stands as the authority and energizing source of all of the body's activity. We then see next that the whole body causes the growth of the body by means of being joined and held together.

This is such as materials in a building would be joined and held together as it is constructed. These two synonyms describe the close uniting of multiple things together.

[27 : 24] We might say a tight knitting together of items. Picture how a carpenter might use a mortise and tenon technique to assemble a piece of furniture where each piece is perfectly carved to interact with the next one so that when they are tightly pushed together, they hold and they fit together and they don't come easily apart.

I personally like the King James' language of fitly joined together and compacted. It just so well captures this idea of what we are to be in the body as the means of how the body is to grow the body.

Now, specifically, again, I already said that speaking truth in love is the means by which we grow up and as we mature. So why is here am I saying that this is the means?

Well, I think how we might distinguish that is speaking truth in love is the specific action you do and then this here of fitly joined together and compacted is the context in which that happens.

This is how it happens. Going on to the next phrase, the body is joined and compacted together through the agency of what every joint supplies.

[28 : 37] So this then is the instrument. How do we get to where we can be fitly joined together and compacted? That sounds great. Well, here's how it happens. The chosen instrument of God in this is every joint.

Now, this term joint is very broad. It can use any kind of things where two things come together. In the context of the body, we accurately understand it as a joint where multiple members come

together.

Now, think with me a second. So the body of Christ is members or parts and each member of the body is us as believers. We are all members of the body. So a joint then is that point of contact between members of the body.

We might call that a relationship, every point of interaction. Notice then what Paul says. The body grows the body indirectly here through what every joint supplies.

So these joints then, these interactions, in the gracious design of God, supply what is needed for the body to grow. And every joint is involved.

[29 : 41] This is really staggering when you think about it. Sometimes we come to church and we kind of have a low view of what can happen in the interactions at church. But every relationship you have with someone from church, every interaction you have, every conversation, how insignificant it may seem, can be used by Christ to supply what is needed for the growth of the body as it is joined and compacted together.

I say can be used because not every relationship or interaction is going to do this if we're not approaching it rightly. I certainly know that I have had relationships in the church where the body was far from being built up.

I was sinning in that relationship and if anything, the body was being torn down and deconstructed and blown apart by my own actions in that relationship. So a relationship is not necessarily going to do this if we're sinning or if we're approaching it wrongly.

So Paul explains then that the whole body causes the growth of the body. Next, we see in proportion to the properly measured working of each individual part.

That's the idea of according to. This is the proportion by which the body causes the growth of the body. In other words, we might say the rate of the body's growth is going to be faster or slower based on whether each individual part is doing its properly measured working.

[31 : 10] Now this phrase, properly measured working, is a bit difficult again, but I believe the idea here is that each part of the body, each person in the church, is working hard in his proper place with his proper gifting.

The working of each part is measured, not in the sense that we might say of something being moderate or only working a little bit, but the idea here is of being appropriate to the function that God has gifted each member for.

Listen to Romans 12, 3-6 because I think the idea here is similar. Paul writes, For through the grace given to me, I say to each one among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to have sound thinking.

Here we see, As God has allotted to each a measure of faith, for just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another, by having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.

So the more here that we humbly assess ourselves and our gifts and then use those gifts to serve others, the faster the body grows because we, as individual parts, are doing our properly measured working.

[32 : 44] But on the other hand, if, as Romans 12 commands, we don't, if we pridefully assume that we are gifted in ways we are not, or if we discount the gift that Christ has gave us and assume that I'm not really gifted that much, I couldn't really be useful, or maybe we rightly assess our gifting but are lazy in how we use it and don't actually do the work with it that we should, or if we have been so uninvolved in the life of the body that we don't even know where we're gifted and we don't have a clue what that proper working would be, to whatever degrees any of those things that are the case, the contribution to the growth of the body from us as one member is going to decrease.

And as a result, the whole growth of the body will suffer. Now again, I can't emphasize enough because it seems that Paul was not able to emphasize enough that the critical significance of every member of the body, every believer in the church.

And one benefit that you have as a smaller body in this local church is you see that more clearly. You're sending away a member right now and you're feeling that loss, that hey, we're going to lose a member who has been serving, who has been a part of this body.

And there's a joy in that because you're sending off but there's also a sadness because you're cutting off one of the members of the body for a time. And so as a small church, you have a real advantage here over a larger church where it can be easier to imagine that you're not that

important.

You here know well if you're involved in this body that every member is critical. And we see here that not only from your experience but here in the text of scripture. So you, Christian, contribute to the growth of the body with your properly measured working.

[34 : 38] And we could also say that you then, on the flip side, detract from the growth of the body to the degree that you are not working with the gifting that Christ has given you. Now, our final phrase tells us about how Christ, how the whole body grows the body and it gives the purpose.

Our purpose as part of the church contributing to the growth of the church is for the building up of the church in love. This is again our edification word.

Now we saw that the building up of the body was the result of the saints' persistent servant work and here it is the purpose of the body's growth of the body. And here we see specifically to be built up in the sphere of love.

Again, we saw the speaking the truth that causes the body to grow is to be done under the control of love and I think here the increase of the body that happens is to be an increase in love.

Now this makes sense. The two greatest commandments that Jesus identified are of course commands to love. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself.

[35 : 50] These commands that our Lord identified as the most significant commands of the law are commands to love. Since this is a purpose, a simple way that you might assess whether you as an individual are growing or whether Cottonwood Bible Church is growing as a church is not to look at the seats and see how many are full and how many are empty but is to ask how are you loving?

Is there more growth in your love for God and your love for neighbor as a body? There is where the Lord wants us to grow.

And if they're His you know that Christ has been at work growing the body through the work of His saints. So, as we consider then how we might apply this means that this the body's every close-knit relationship I'd like to come back as I said to a couple of the challenges that come to speaking the truth in love and we can see how this verse is going to address those challenges.

So, it is hard to speak the truth in love to someone when you don't know them. You meet them on the street they walk into church it's hard to speak truth in love effectively to them.

I'm trying to do that now to people that I don't really know. I've started to get to know you last week and so I know more about you this week than I did last week. And it's a little easier because here in the context of preaching I'm simply opening up and saying what the scripture has to say.

[37 : 23] But in a personal context where I was trying to help you with something you were dealing with I wouldn't be able to do that very effectively. It would be very difficult. Well, you know no wonder then that Paul says that the body grows the body by being fitly joined and compacted together.

You know the more closely that you are knitted to and connected with the other members in your church the better you will be able to speak truth in love to them and the better they will be able to speak truth in love to you.

You have to you have to let them learn about you and what's going on in your heart and what challenges you're facing and where you're struggling to believe God and where you're struggling to defeat sin and where you're struggling to grow in Christlikeness.

They have to know those things about you and you have to know those things about them otherwise you're not going to be able to speak truth that's fitted for the moment and in love to effectively grow the body.

Knowing those things about each other helps us tailor the truth that we give so that it can be the most helpful and the most loving. I'm sure you've had times when maybe someone said something to you that you know they meant it for benefit but it was really not helpful and it was because they didn't know something about you that would make it unhelpful in the way they said it or what they said.

[38 : 50] We've all had those experiences and unfortunately we've probably all done that to others at times as well whether we know it or not and so that's why this fitting and compacting together is so crucial.

You know sometimes again we may know that someone needs edification we know they're going through this difficult trial and I know they probably need to be strengthened in their faith here or

whatever the issue may be but we just don't end up seeing them.

We miss them at church Sunday morning maybe we're sick they're sick something happens and there's no joint that ends up happening where us as members of the body actually interact that joint just doesn't end up happening and there's a missed connection rather than a connection or you know other things that may cause this is we might have a strained relationship with someone and so expressing the truth in that way would then become awkward or even even unhelpful perhaps because there's been a straining in that joint and now truth can't be spoken in love from that one member to another effectively.

You know both these scenarios highlight the points of having as we said good joints good relationships and interactions between the members of the body so that truth again is to be effectively done in love.

We need to make time to be with one another and to humbly love one another and to live in unity and harmony with one another so that that truth can do its maturing work.

[40 : 21] sometimes again we might feel utterly inadequate to speak truth to others. We don't think that we're any good at it. We don't think that hey I'm not any good at that I can't do that how am I going to do that?

But when we know that the body grows according to the properly measured working of each part that encourages us to then learn okay how is it that Christ has equipped me with a gift so that I can do my properly measured working.

We need to learn those things and then serve the body with those things. And as we learn what that properly measured working looks like for us in the unique package of gifting that Christ has given us we're learning and becoming more practiced in the way that we have been suited by Christ to express truth to one another.

You know sometimes and I say that this is especially common for we young men we do know the truth to say or at least we think we do but when we speak it the effect is anything but loving.

Not only however must the expression of truth be controlled by love but the goal of edification must be increased love. It is easy to say hey I'm speaking this truth out of love I'm doing this out of love I know it's going to hurt but it's in love brother and we can say that easily but if an unbiased and mature observer doesn't see the recipients of such truth built up in love we have reason to question whether it was actually said under the controlling influence of love and so it is through the bodies every close knit relationship that the body grows because it's through them that the appropriate truth can be well spoken in genuine love so the growth of the body is not something that we just sit back and say God does it we know not how he has told us with great specificity exactly what it is that results in the growth of the body and the fulfillment of Christ's promise that he would build his church very clear very specific exactly what we need to be doing exactly the things we need to be pursuing if the body is to grow as it should and if we don't do those the growth of the body will slow so these four means again are the hard won gifts of Christ the saints persistent servant work everyone's loving expression of truth and the body's every close-knit relationship now unfortunately this growth again is not automatic it cannot just be assumed it's going to happen now this purpose again of growth is building up in the arena of love and that is a barometer of whether this growth is happening and sadly the church that received this letter the church in Ephesus failed in this very area some three decades after they received this letter they received another letter this time directly from

[43 : 36] Christ through the apostle John in Revelation 2 and while they had done well in holding fast against error with the truth they've held fast to the truth they've rejected error and they have patiently endured suffering so they haven't totally bombed it we might say but Jesus said in Revelation 2 4 but this I have against you that you have left your first love therefore remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent so far from maturing and being built up in love the church in Ephesus in a mere three decades after this letter had declined in love to a point that Jesus says I'm no longer going to recognize you as a true church unless you get busy repenting and getting back to loving the way you did at first how could this happen this was a healthy thriving church that had an influence throughout its area it was pastored for a while by the apostle

Paul probably pastored by John in between there pastored by Timothy this was a church that was healthy and effective in three decades how did they lose their love to the point that Jesus would

threaten to take away their recognition by him as a real church that he was a part of well if these four means that the church grows lead to the body being built up in love at some point they must have slowed and ultimately stopped in pursuing those means the evangelists and shepherds and teachers given by Christ must to degrees have been neglected and slowly and ultimately no longer sought out by the saints for their own equipping the difficult servant work of building up the body of Christ no doubt began to seem too hard and persisting in it until everyone became as mature as Christ that standard just seemed too unrealistic too high no one's ever going to get there we shouldn't really be so concerned about aiming for that kind of a target they seem at least to have continued to express truth and to avoid being deceived and buffeted about by error but the truth was not being delivered under the control of love and the relationships seem not to have been fitted and compacted together with each member working in their proper station but as truth was spoken without love the body was drifting apart and they were no longer held together in unity so the potential danger of failing as a church to pursue these means is real but by the grace of God growth is possible and not only possible but if we by faith walk in what God has commanded it is promised from Christ our head the body can be built up in love he is the one who builds his church he grows his church and it's from him that we look to supply everything that we need it's from him that we look to bring about this growth that we long for and we prayed for earlier in the service to him alone we ultimately need to look to supply what is needed and so to him let us go and seek his grace on that account heavenly father we are grateful for your truth and the word that you have given to us thank you for its clarity thank you for the specificity that it gives and what we are to do and what we are to be as Christians and as a church lord jesus we thank you for saving us and uniting us with you as members of your body lord what a mercy thank you for gathering lord these believers together as a local expression of that body lord i pray that your word would have its desired effect that you would equip these dear saints with their pastor to do the work of service and that they would persist in that lord may they speak truth and love to one another and that they might grow up in all aspects and to you lord jesus lord may this church be so joined together tightly that even when a member leaves even temporarily it feels like an amputation lord may that be just more and more true of this body thank you for the saints here and thank you for the ways they have been pursuing these means and i pray that you would use this text to equip them to do that even more until we all attain to your likeness lord jesus we pray these things knowing that we in ourselves are utterly inadequate but we look to you for the grace and the mercy to supply what is needed in jesus name amen well again let's consider how we might personally apply these things and respond to them in our hearts just release probably all on the
Thi