

Building Up The Body

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[0 : 00] Well, we've come now to what I think is the quintessential text on healthy, authentic, and maybe even we would say organic church growth.

It would be difficult to point to another passage in the Bible, actually, that more helpfully summarizes God's plan for building up his people. In fact, Paul actually uses that type of terminology here in the verses that we just read.

That the things that he is teaching, the things that he is conveying from God's plan to the people in Ephesus is actually God's plan for building his church, for building up his people.

And in a sense, these verses, especially verses 11 through 16, kind of serve as the heart of this particular series of studies that we're going through.

It's not the whole of it, certainly not the sum of it, but it is perhaps the heart of what I'm trying to get to in maybe we would say even casting a vision for what I believe the Lord would desire for our church to be.

[1 : 13] And I genuinely do believe that God will bless and will establish our church for the long term only as we grasp and endeavor to obey the truths that are represented here in this particular text.

There are a plethora of church growth experts that have developed all kinds of strategies to help pastors, quote, build churches.

And most of them are rooted in business culture where an emphasis on hard work, cultural sensitivities, and commitment to process is what produces profitable results.

Now, those things aren't bad. Certainly hard work and being mindful of your cultural context and being committed to certain processes and administration, those things aren't bad things. But they've made that the whole of it, where if you'll just follow this strategy, it will surely produce success.

And then ministry success and church health are measured by the same criteria as a secular business, which would then be organizational growth, brand awareness, profitability.

[2 : 45] Do you see? It's not difficult to see this in the Christian realm, is it? It's very easy to see that we would gauge by nature, maybe even most of the time, but we would naturally gauge the success or the health of a ministry based on whether or not it is growing in breadth, whether staff is being added, whether the income and the giving is actually going up rather than going down.

Are they developing more ministries? Is there more happening? You know what I mean? And sometimes we can mistake that. And certainly when the Lord does a unique work in a church, things like that happen.

I understand that. I'm not saying that that's not true. But when we gauge the success and the health of a church by those criterias, we actually go quite wrong.

Pastors end up being lured into lectures that are geared toward topics titled something like the next 100, how to get the next 100 people into your church, or ways to increase giving by 60% in the new year.

Those are real lectures, real titles that are often pushed in front of pastors, because that ultimately would seem to be the goal for many of them.

[4 : 08] That the value of who I am and what my church is, is not really based on faithfulness, though they would care about that.

It's actually based on these tangible things that we can measure. I'm not saying it's bad to desire that type of growth in your church. It certainly is good.

If you didn't have a desire for your church to grow, it means that you probably don't have much of a desire for people to come to Christ or for people to be faithful to the Lord or for the Lord to do unique works in and through the ministry to which you belong.

Those things are not bad in and of themselves. But this is just a small sampling and example of what the mindset of the Christian culture has devolved into when it comes to ideas of church growth and church health.

They just define it in a way that's unhelpful, and I really actually think ungodly. Where pastors are measured by effectiveness rather than faithfulness.

[5 : 16] Ministries are evaluated by creativity rather than fruitfulness. Services are built on a consumer experience rather than genuine worship.

But that's a problem. That's not the definition I'm working with when I use the phrase church growth or church health this morning. I actually wanted to turn our eyes to actually what the scriptures have to say for us here about this.

Because when the New Testament speaks of church growth, it does so in terms of maturity, not metrics. The apostles weren't concerned primarily with a congregation's size, but its faithfulness to the Bible and its fruitfulness in the Spirit.

And rather than viewing the local church as an organization that needs to be built, they saw it more like an organism, living, breathing, growing in the power of God and His Spirit.

And the bottom line is that people, humans, can build successful organizations. We can do that.

[6 : 34] Only God can build healthy churches. You see, that's the difference. It's actually God's work to build this church. And He's actually given us a plan to follow, a plan that He uses, His design, to actually see this work move forward.

Like I said, verses 11 to 16 is where we're really going to find this process laid out. But before we get there, let's just walk through verses 1 through 10 quickly. Let me just point out two kind of categorical things here that are worth noting.

The first thing is our calling, our calling. Now remember in chapter 2 a few weeks ago, we saw that we are united together on account of our union with Christ.

That there is a supernatural unifying work that takes place when Christ through His blood redeems us and reconciles us to God. And in doing that, He actually reconciles us to one another.

Not that He just brings people from different cultures together with this amalgamation and mixed context. It's not that. He's creating a new people. His new kingdom people.

[7 : 51] It's something that we are called to be in the gospel. Something that we are called to reflect as we move forward in the gospel as well. And here, the theological truth of Ephesians 2 is actually coming through in Paul's words as practical instruction.

Look at verse 1. I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, listen to the verbs here. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

What's that calling? That calling. Chapter 2 tells us that calling is the unity that the Holy Spirit has brought together in the kingdom people of God, in the church.

We have been called as a people together. And Paul is saying there is practical instruction in this. Yes, the Spirit is what brings us together through the gospel of Jesus.

But I am urging you, Ephesians. I'm urging you. I'm challenging you. I'm instructing you to walk worthy of that call.

[8 : 56] That the way that you live and move and behave and work with the people of God in the local church should reflect a life that is worthy meeting the standards of the call that God has actually put on your life as the church.

And then he tells us how. With humility and gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another in love.

Those are very difficult things. Because in the context of the Ephesian church, you actually have real enemies. Cultural enemies.

And the Jews and the Gentiles coming together. And then there's all the subsets of problems relationally and socially and culturally that come from extensions of even that type of enemy.

And we have that in our own churches, right? We're all very different people. We come from very different places. We have very different personalities. And it requires that if we're going to walk worthy of the call that God has put in our lives as a church, it's going to require that each of us do that with some humility.

[10 : 09] That we develop in our lives. Some gentleness with one another. Some patience. Bearing with one another.

Now, it's really interesting that this is what Paul goes to. He assumes that in the local church, you're going to have problems with people. He assumes here that there are going to be people in every church that get on everybody else's nerves.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have to say, bearing with one another. Right? Do you see that here? And his answer is not, when this church really gets on your nerves, go to one that gets on your nerves a little less.

No, his answer is actually, no, get over yourself and walk in a way that's worthy of the call that God has put on your life. Learn humility and patience and gentleness.

Bearing with one another in love. And then he says, being eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

[11 : 20] In other words, it is the spirit that brings us together. But then God calls us to eagerly pursue this unity together. That we're not looking for ways to be a part.

We're actually looking for ways to diminish our disagreements and our differences in order that we can pursue the unity that the Holy Spirit is actually establishing in the gospel.

This is what we're called to be. It's what we're called to do. And then he makes it even better.

There's one body. There's one spirit. You're called to one hope.

It belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. What a unity that is in the gospel. And he says, pursue that. Live as a church in a way that is worthy of that.

So we see our calling. But then we see our gifting is the next thing. Our gifting. So Christ, as Lord, aids us in this calling.

[12 : 23] Because let's be honest. Let's be honest. If we were all just to sit down at the end of the service and say, all right. I know a lot of people aren't here today. If we were to huddle up and say, all right, we're going to do this thing.

We're going to be humble and gentle and patient. And we're going to bear with one another. It's not going to take very long for us to fail, right?

Because we can't actually do that. It's not actually in our power in and of ourselves to live in a way that's like that. And so Christ, our Lord, who calls us to that in the gospel, actually begins to aid us in his power through the spirit to do it.

And that's what these verses tell us. Verse seven. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gifts.

In other words, Christ is gifting each one of us. Though we are all called into one body, each individual has a particular gift that Christ has enabled to help us pursue this calling that he's given.

[13 : 30] Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave men gifts. And then there's this parenthetical, Paul never wastes an opportunity to work in his Christology. And he says, by ascending, that means that he must have descended, which goes back to Philippians chapter two.

Jesus was in the form of God, and he thought equality with God a thing not to be grasped, but he humbled himself and became obedient unto death.

He took on the form of a servant. He descended to the earth. And then after his resurrection, he ascended back to the exalted place where he reigns as Lord, which means that this is his call, but it's also his gift to help us and aid us in pursuing this call.

And it's only at that point that Paul then begins to describe this process, that he begins to describe the truth about church growth and about church health.

You see, God's plan for church growth and health is very simple. It's ordinary, intentional discipling.

[14 : 43] Discipling being that process by which Christians help one another faithfully follow Jesus in the power of the Spirit through the teaching of the Bible.

And that's what Paul goes on to describe here. It's not flashy. It's certainly not fast. It's not typically easy, and it's almost never convenient.

It requires commitment. It requires labor. It requires sacrifice. Most of all, it requires genuine love.

But according to the Bible, this is actually what God's plan is. So let's look at it together. Number one, I want you to see God's program. God's program.

Verse 11, and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

[15 : 47] Three phrases here that I want to work through. He gave to equip for the work. Do you see them there in the text? He gave to equip for the work.

Well, what did he give? He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, or shepherd teachers. So God has gifted every believer uniquely to serve the church, but he has gifted the church with certain individuals to lead it in truth.

Now, what's common about or among the categories that Paul mentions here is that they all possess the gift of helpfully and accurately teaching God's word, the Bible.

They have word-based gifts, and Paul says that they are special gifts from Christ to the church, but they each have unique functions in the church.

But Paul says, first off, Christ has given to the church these people. Well, I've been trying to tell Julie for years that I'm a gift from God, and here Paul gives me some support.

[17 : 03] Well, let's work through these categories. The apostles were men who had witnessed the resurrected Christ. They were specially commissioned by Jesus to be a witness to the world.

It was an unrepeatable group, endowed with the Spirit's power that on occasion revealed itself through signs and wonders, and God used them as instruments to give us the New Testament scriptures.

So that's actually a category here, the apostles. That's who they were. They were a gift to the church, still are. Not that they are still, it's an unrepeatable group, not that they are still apostles in that sense, but what Christ gifted to the church is still a benefit to us as we come to the scriptures. That's the apostles. Next was the prophets. These men were close associates of the apostles within the churches. They were gifted by God to communicate and teach God's word prior to the final completion of the New Testament.

So their prophecies didn't consist of fortune-telling. That's not what this was. This wasn't future predictions necessarily, except on very rare occasions we see that in the New Testament.

[18 : 22] But for the most part, these prophets and their prophecies were not those things. It was just simply the ability to communicate God's new covenant truth during the apostolic age.

So there's a significance to these first two categories, the apostles and the prophets. Kent Hughes tells us the apostles and the prophets were given to the church to get her established, but now their role is assumed by the canonical writings of the New Testament.

So we don't look for the gifts of apostles and of prophets any longer. We simply go to the New Testament scriptures. That was their purpose in establishing the church and giving us the word of God.

And let me just show you two places in Ephesians that helps us to understand that. Look back at chapter 2 and verse 20 with your Bibles open there, that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

The apostles and the prophets, not themselves being the foundation, but what they taught as it related to the gospel of Christ. That's the foundation of truth established for the church.

[19 : 33] Chapter 3 and verse 5, So there's a unique function here for these two groups.

And what ultimately we have is the fruit of the New Testament. Now that moves us on to the next three. Evangelist is the next one. The evangelists were and still are uniquely gifted to preach the gospel with great clarity and fruitfulness.

Now every Christian is called to do the work of an evangelist, the work of evangelism. But God does gift some people in the church to do so with tremendous impact.

Kent Hughes refers to them as the obstetricians of the church. Those gifted at bringing in new births, so to speak. There are people that are just uniquely gifted by God to helpfully and clearly preach and share the gospel with other people, especially those who have not heard it.

We see this so often represented in missionary endeavors. We're not so much thinking of itinerant missionaries. We're not thinking so much of camp meeting style deals.

[20 : 53] That's not really what we're thinking of here. We're thinking of in the terms of the local church, people uniquely gifted by God with a passion and a clarity to preach the gospel. And then he says shepherds and teachers or pastors and teachers.

And many believe that shepherds and teachers refer to a single gift and function in the church rather than two. And the Greek construction here does actually allow for that to be true, but it doesn't demand it.

So I'm going to let you decide where you ultimately land on that. It could be that Paul was distinguishing pastors who are gifted to teach.

We know that in the pastoral epistles, you can't be a pastor if you can't teach, right? That's one of the things that are necessary qualifications for a pastor. So he could be distinguishing that from teachers who are not necessarily called or gifted to be elders in the church.

It could be that he's making that distinction. Most people look at this and actually see because of the Greek construction that this is actually referring to shepherd teachers or pastor teachers.

[22 : 06] I'll leave it to you to study that further if you'd like. But the point here is that God has gifted the church with individuals specially gifted to teach and shepherd through the Bible.

So from our perspective today, the apostles and prophets are represented by the scriptures. Why evangelists, pastors, and teachers are church leaders whose primary function is to teach the Bible. Paul wrote that these individuals are gifts from Jesus to his church. Now, for what purpose then did Jesus give these gifts to the church? He gave, here's the purpose, to equip.

Equip what? Or equip who? To equip the saints, it says. The saints is not a special category of Christians, but to all believers.

And equip here, in this sense, carries the idea of preparation or training. The Greeks used it in a medical way, referring to setting a bone in place.

[23 : 14] And Paul's point is that in God's program, he has given the church individuals to prepare and train all the believers to fulfill their own function in the church.

Now, what is that function? That's the next part. He gave to equip for the work. What's the work? He tells us. For the work of ministry, which is building up the body of Christ. In other words, Paul says, building up the body, what we're calling discipling, is a work to which every single believer is called.

And while the responsibility for church growth and church health, a prize in a unique sense to church leaders, the work that produces healthy churches, belongs to each one of us.

You see, this is where so many Christians immediately go wrong. So many view their role in the church as merely providing compensation for the pastor and staff so that they can carry out the work of the ministry.

[24 : 32] They never really think about being responsible themselves for the church's spiritual health. They have more of a consumer view. That they pay the guys to do the things so that they can sit back and reap the benefits of the things that they pay the guys to do.

Now, we've all been in churches like this, where there is a disparity, where there's, on one hand, there is the professional ministers, and on the other hand, there is the members of the church, and the professional ministers do the work of the ministry, and the people of the church receive the work of the ministry.

But that's not actually the vision that Paul puts forth here. That's not actually what God's program is like at all. God's design is such that he gifts men to train and prepare the people to carry out the work of building up the church.

So not only do we belong together, but we're in this thing together. Do you see that? And we talked about the belonging a couple weeks ago, and it's going to be a theme every single week as we come to these passages.

We belong together, and we belong together because God has put us together. It's not because we chose one another. It's because he chose us, and in choosing us, he has united us together in his gospel.

[26 : 01] So you're stuck whether you want to be or not. That's just how this works now, right? And not only do we belong together, but this whole idea of Lakeside Bible Church, and the work that's being accomplished here, and the growth and the health, that we're actually in this thing together.

And it's not because I want us to be in it together. It's because it's actually what God has called us to do. He gifts his church with people who have the unique responsibility to train and prepare the people so that the people can do the work of the ministry.

And I think this is something that we really need to begin to understand. John Stott said, It effectively eliminates the traditional model of the local church as a pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath and serried ranks of inferiority.

It also shoots down the model of a bus, he says, in which the pastor does all the driving, while the congregation are the passengers, slumbering in peaceful security behind.

Notice the commitment here to the local church that's required in this call. You see, that's the implication of this text, I think, is often missing.

[27 : 36] I don't mean to say that in an accusatory way. I mean, you're here today. All of you are involved in some way or another in doing exactly this in our church. I hope you don't misunderstand what I'm trying to say, but in order for this to actually happen, this discipling culture that's represented in Ephesians 4, it requires a unique commitment that goes above and beyond, actually greatly above and beyond simply attending a service on a Sunday and signing up for the occasional event that comes our way.

This is actually much grander than that. It's actually much heavier than that. Much important or important than that. And I think probably the reason it has become the way that it has in so many churches is because pastors that aren't willing to share their responsibility, that's part of it.

I think part of it also could be that people just are content with not really being all that committed. Paul envisions a people thoroughly developed in the Word by gifted teachers that then enables them to evangelize, teach, and encourage others through the Word.

This is true discipling. It's God's program for the local church. And if we're going to be a healthy church here, it's got to be woven into the very DNA of who we are.

That's God's program. Secondly, and quickly, we see God's purpose. God's purpose. So if God's program for the church is to develop a discipling culture, what is His intended purpose or result for it?

[29 : 25] And the answer is that the church will grow in spiritual maturity. Now, a healthy church will inevitably, in most cases, grow in number.

There will be seasons of harvest. When the wind of the Spirit will blow, people will be saved and added to the church. But notice, the measure of success in these verses is not the breadth of the church, but its depth.

And Paul contrasts for us in verses 13 and 14. The spiritually mature church and the spiritually immature church.

Look at verse 13. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure, the stature, the fullness of Christ.

So three things happen when a church follows God's program. It reaches the unity of faith, the knowledge of Christ, and the fullness of Christ. The faith here doesn't refer to conversion, but to a united commitment to the body of Christian truth and doctrine.

[30 : 36] MacArthur describes this as the content of the gospel in its most complete form. So the faith then is when a church is not simply aware of Bible doctrine, but is steadfastly united in its commitment to it.

That's an important distinction here. That as we follow God's program, what will inevitably happen is that our church will grow deeper in the word to attain the unity of the faith, the full body of Christian doctrine.

It won't stay on the surface. It will actually begin to grow deep into the word, into our understanding of it. The knowledge of the Son of God is what moves us from the intellectual to the relational.

It's that place of spiritual maturity where a believer is wholeheartedly devoted to personally knowing Jesus through worship, prayer, Bible study.

Remember Paul reflected on this in his own desire in Philippians 3. Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count all things as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, he says.

[31 : 54] He goes on to say later, my goal in this life is to know Christ, to know him, that I may know him, the power of his resurrection being made conformable to his death. The fullness of Christ is when that knowledge produces and transforms our behavior.

It's when a church is marked by its conformity to Christ, his ways, and his teaching. So the measure of a healthy church then is when it's marked by a commitment to Christian doctrine, intimate love for Jesus, and a radical conformity to the image of Christ.

So then Paul contrasts that, this mature manhood, he says, with spiritual infancy in verse 14. Read that with me. So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning and by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

The church is not faithful to God's program or marked then by this spiritual immaturity. Paul says they're like a boat caught in a storm, constantly shifting one set of beliefs to another. James described these people as double-minded, unstable in all their ways. And according to Paul, these churches are then susceptible to false doctrine, winsome personalities, and deceptive methods.

[33 : 24] So then when a church becomes less concerned about biblical fidelity than it is about tangible metrics of success, it will inevitably accumulate cunning leaders who develop deceitful schemes and fall into false doctrines.

So we've got two pictures here. We've got God's program and the church that follows God's program represented in steadfastness and in faith and in unity. And then we've got those who abandon God's program to follow their own ways and they end up finding themselves with leaders that probably aren't actually Christian who have developed deceitful schemes to help push them forward as an organization but not actually very deep as a true church.

And notice how important doctrine is in this entire passage. Everything about these gifts to the church involve teaching. Everything about the reflection of spiritual maturity is about knowledge and what that knowledge then produces in practical experience in our lives.

Knowledge of biblical truth should be a passion for God's people not a drudgery. That doesn't mean that we all have to be Bible eggheads or that we develop this persona or this air that just seems to take ourselves too seriously.

But it does mean that we should take our calling seriously. We should take the Bible seriously. We should take our worship seriously.

[35 : 04] And then notice how long this God's program is to be in effect. He tells us in verse 13 until all attain. In other words it doesn't end until we're called to heaven.

Because if the church is healthy and growing that means it will inevitably be evangelizing which means that once you disciple one person to be united in the faith and in the knowledge of God and in the fullness of Christ there's inevitably going to be another person over here that's just a baby in Christ.

And they need your time and your affection and your patience and your gentleness. They're going to need you to bear with them. And you may get to a point where you just think man I'm tired.

Well the job isn't over until we get to heaven. Thirdly we see God's process. God's process verse 15 rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ. Let me summarize it this way maybe condensing the verse down to this by speaking the truth in love will grow up into Christ.

[36 : 22] Speaking the truth in love will grow up into Christ. This is actually the process of how all of this happens. Now let's break down this phrase speaking the truth in love. First they're speaking which means that even before we get to the unique giftedness that Christ has given to each one of us we know that all of us have a word based ministry to one another.

And this is going to show itself in many different ways based on how God has gifted you but at the foundation of it is we have a word based ministry. We are to know God's word and then communicate God's word to one another.

It's not all that we do for one another but it is the priority of what we must do. And once again the intentional togetherness that characterizes God's people comes to the surface here.

We are to prioritize our lives to regularly gather with other Christians to grow together. We have to speak which means that some of us need to learn to speak. Some of us need to learn to let others speak.

I would put myself in that category probably. We gotta start talking to each other if we're ever gonna do this it starts with actually having a conversation with somebody or prioritizing your time and your life in such a way that you can have a conversation with somebody which I know comes easier to some of us than it comes to other but it's actually a responsibility that each of us have.

[37 : 49] Speaking. The next thing is the truth. So we talk to one another but then we talk to one another about the truth of God. So then it's one thing for faith for Christians to faithfully gather together.

It's another thing when our conversations are filled with the things of God. I don't mean that every conversation we have has to be a Bible study. Sometimes we can fall into a bit of a trap with that where we think that if we get together and we don't actually all pull out our Bibles and read a text

and actually begin to break apart that we haven't actually done what God has called us to do. That's not at all what I mean. It's not that every conversation is a Bible study but the Bible should infuse every conversation that we have so that the scriptures then guide and confirm and move forward our counsel so that a man in a difficult place in his marriage unhappy with his wife may go to his unbelieving friend at work who might commiserate with his circumstance and his counsel would be well there's a lot of fish in the sea you know you're young enough just get out of it while you can you'll find somebody else.

Oh but then but then there's when that man sits down over coffee with another believer who's really spent a lot of time in the word and he says no well how much time have you actually spent loving your wife the way that Christ loves the church and even if she's the worst woman you've ever known in your life your responsibility and covenant has been made to her your responsibility to God is actually to be faithful to her to love her to care for her you see you don't have to sit down and have a bible study to do that you just have to know your bible enough so that your conversations are then infused with the word of God the devotional life that you have in private worship should regularly spill over into conversations with other believers when you're together and you're talking about things of life you should routinely be making a statement similar to well let's think about what the bible says about this like does it does it tell us anything that might help us understand this better or guide our behavior in this way that's what should characterize our speech so we're speaking we're speaking the truth and then there's this really hard thing at the very end of it that we're doing this actually in love you know it's amazing how often the new testament reminds us that love is to characterize our relationship with God and with others because it's the hardest thing to do it's the hardest thing to do even when speaking the truth about the bible it's possible for us to lack genuine love and compassion for others and by the way people are not blind to this people know if you care people typically can pick up on the fact of whether or not you're saying these things because you just want to tell them how to do things or because you're genuinely concerned for their spiritual health somebody the other day was made a joke about how it seems that so many people that have a familiarity with the bible their favorite verse is judge not lest you be judged and we laughed about it because well so many times that just means don't tell me what to do kind of attitude but let's be honest here for just a second

I understand why a lot of baby christians love that verse because a lot of other christians are just jerks we wield the sword of the spirit to harm rather than to heal and we'll speak and we may even speak a lot and the things that we say are truthful things and maybe even biblical things but the way that we communicate is not a way that is filled with the grace and the love of christ and there's a big difference in that that's why this is the hardest part because it gets from our heads to our heart to where we're not just spilling out the things that we know about god but we're actually communicating them with what we know to be true of god's love for us and in conformity to christ we then respond to them in the way that christ would respond to them paul said that when we speak truth and love we grow up into christ we grow deep in the word colin marshall said this happens in our gatherings but it also happens day by day as christians speak the truth to each other and exhort one another to stay strong it happens in our homes as fathers bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the lord it happens in the world as we proclaim the excellencies of christ before the nations and engage in gracious salty conversations with others giving gentle respectful answers about the christian hope well let's finish with verse 16 shall we speaking of christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love so paul rounds out the instruction here the joints with which the body is equipped do you see that in verse 16 the joints with which the body is equipped refers to each believer in the church this is not the same as the training and preparation that is mentioned earlier in the passage this is actually referring to people we are the things with which the church is equipped meaning that christ has gifted and called each one of us to build up the body and then there's this other phrase when each part is working properly the body builds itself up now how antithetical to the modern church is it when god's program doesn't ultimately depend on professional ministers who are paid to do the work the only way a church will grow in spiritual maturity is when the congregation takes responsibility for itself when believers are trained and prepared by gifted leaders to help one another faithfully follow

[44 : 18] Jesus and when each joint with which the body of the church is put together and equipped when it's all working properly the church grows not necessarily in breadth though that will probably be the case over time but in depth spiritual maturity and in likeness to christ so many

christians seem content to live out their christian life and experience as consumers engaging with the church only to the extent that it's worthwhile to them but god actually calls us all to be consumers yes that's a part of it but to also be contributors it's a responsibility we have i think it's a responsibility for which each of us will be judged because remember what paul says before he gets to verse 11 this calling and this gifting comes from a lord who has brought us together called us into this work and one day he will return to judge the work that we've actually done and accomplished you see that's where that's where the heaviness of this responsibility begins to fall on us when we see that this isn't just what jared is telling us to do this is this is actually something that christ has commanded us to do and it's not jared that will stand before one day it's christ and as paul said to the corinthians when we stand before christ we will be saved but there's a good chance that a lot of our works are going to be burnt up if there are any to even be judged and so paul says in verse one i urge you ephesians i urge you and if i can just echo that to say i urge you lakeside bible church i urge you to do these things