

Before we read out of Ephesians 4:1-16, there are a couple of things that I want to communicate up front. Number one, I am primarily going to be speaking tonight to those of you who are covenant members or those of you who are pursuing covenant membership. So if you're a guest or regular attender, I hope that there are things that you hear that would encourage your heart and that God would use to minister to you by His Spirit. But I'm primarily aiming what I'm saying at those who are covenant members or those who are pursuing covenant membership. My reason for that is really simple. It's because that's who Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians to. He wrote the letter to this local church in Ephesus. So of course it would make sense that this letter that was written to a local church would speak more pointedly to those of us who are a local church. So as I read through this letter and what Paul is saying to this church, I'm going to keep communicating and drawing out implications for those of us who are the Village Church – Denton. And the second thing I just want to encourage us toward tonight and every time we gather is to not just think of you as we read the Scriptures tonight, but think of we as well. I think that we tend to listen to the preaching of God's Word very individualistically, which is not bad or sinful, but the reality is that most of these letters in the New Testament were written to groups of people. So Paul wrote this letter of Ephesians to this local church. So this local church would have received this letter and they would read it out loud to the congregation. So the congregation would gather in a home or a meeting place and they would read this letter. And the congregation would hear it for the congregation, for the community. Of course there are implications for the individual all throughout this letter and the other letters, but they would also listen with an ear toward hearing as a corporate body. So I'm really hoping and praying that God would train us to do that. Because I just don't think we do that naturally. I think as Westerners, we just hear things individualistically. So when Matt or whoever preaches or even when we sing songs, we're just not thinking about the corporate body as much as we're thinking about ourselves. So I hope that as we're hearing for our own hearts and own lives, we're also thinking about and hearing the Scriptures for our community. So that's one of the things I want to encourage you to do tonight. Here's the main thing I want you to take away tonight. So if you go to dinner, if you are talking to somebody tomorrow about this service, what I want you to tell them and what I want you to get is simply that this evening your pastor gave you an encouragement to continue to minister to one another as a church and build each other up in love. That's what I hope you say, and that's how I hope you summarize tonight. And I know that in your faith journey, this service, this sermon is just a little bitty encouragement along the way. I'm great with that and I thank the Lord for that, but I hope that the encouragement you take away is simply to continue to be the church, to continue to build one another up in love, to continue to serve one another and minister one another.

So all that being said, let me read Ephesians 4:1-16. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to the one hope that 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. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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 of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 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, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Let’s pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us. “Father, we thank You for this portion of Scripture that You inspired the apostle Paul to write by Your Spirit. Holy Spirit, we pray now that You would take this letter to a church two thousand years ago and teach us as a church what this means for us, what the implications of what Paul says here are for us as a body. I do pray and ask that You would give us an ear to hear these things for our body corporately as well as for ourselves individually. And I pray, God, that You would encourage Your church tonight to continue to love one another, build into one another and minister to one another. I pray and ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

Verse 1 of Ephesians 4 is really a transition verse in this letter. In chapters 1-3, Paul is really unpacking this mystery that God has taught him about the gospel. He’s unpacking this mystery that the Gentiles (those who were not of Jewish heritage) have been included into the family of faith. And to Paul, this is just a marvelous, wonderful, beautiful thing. So he takes chapters 1-3 and he unpacks this and communicates to this body of believers that they have been saved by faith through faith, not of themselves. It’s not work; it’s just God saving them. He says this in a number of ways. He talks about them being adopted. He talks about God lavishing His mercy on them before the foundation of the world to the praise of His glorious grace. It’s just Paul unpacking the gospel. So he does that in chapters 1-3, and we get here in chapter 4 and he begins to transition. He begins to teach the church, “Okay, in light of you having been saved like this, here’s how you’re to live.” It’s the same thing that God did through Moses when He rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Moses takes them out upon the hill, and what does God do there? After He saves them by grace, He begins to teach them through the ten commandments, “Here’s what it means to live as My people who have been saved by Grace. It’s a similar deal that Paul is doing here. So in Ephesians 4:1, he says, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord. . .” Paul is in jail as he is writing this letter. He’s literally a prisoner. It’s not just a cute way of saying, “I’m a servant of Christ.” He’s actually saying, “I’m a prisoner for the Lord.”

Let’s keep reading. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you. . .” That “you” there is corporate. “I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. . .” This calling is not vocational. He’s not talking about someone’s calling to be a plumber, a banker, a teacher or whatever. He’s not talking about a calling into local mission, international mission, to be single or to choose this major or that major. That’s not the type of calling that Paul is talking about here. The type of calling that he’s talking about here is more fundamental. It’s the calling that he has been talking about in Ephesians 1-3, namely the calling of these men and women into the family of God. That’s what Paul is talking about. He spent chapters 1-3 explaining to these Christians how they’ve been brought into the family of God, and with wonder and praise, he has explained to them that they have been chosen and adopted. So in chapter 4, Paul makes the transition to exhorting them to live in light of this calling. So he’s saying, “In light of you being called into God’s family by faith, live like it. Live in light of that calling.”

It’s important to see in this verse the inside-out nature of Christianity. Christianity is lived from the inside-out, not the outside-in. It’s really the only religion that lives like that. Paul is saying here, “Once you’ve embraced the gospel with your heart, once you get that internally, once what God has done for you in Christ penetrates your heart at the deepest levels, then from the inside-out, you live like this. So you get the gospel, you believe what Christ has done for you and then because of your belief in that, you live like this.” It’s utterly inside-out, and all the other religions of the world are outside-in. Every religion outside of Christianity is outside-in. They operate on the principle, “I am accepted by God because I obey Him. I obey God, I do this outwardly so that He’ll accept me.” Christianity is the opposite. Christianity is, “I’ve been accepted by God through Jesus Christ, therefore I obey.” One is outside-in and the other is inside-out. So I

think it's important to note, as you read the rest of Ephesians, Paul is here setting an anchor in the ground saying, "In light of what you've just heard and what I've just told you, live like this." It's inside-out.

He says, "Walk in light of your calling." And then in verse 2, he begins to explain what it looks like for a local church to live in light of this wonderful calling that we have into God's family. Verse 2, ". . .with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." So what does it look like for a local church to live in light of this calling? Well the local church becomes marked by these characteristics. The local church becomes a community that is marked by love for one another, by humility toward one another, by gentleness and by patience. It's really unbelievable. At first glance, it looks like these words here are somewhat basic. It's like, "Oh yeah. Of course." But what he's writing here is just as counter-cultural today as it was 2000 years ago. If you really stopped to think about these words and what they mean, what other community on the face of the planet do you know that lives marked by these things? Just think about your work. Can you imagine what it would look like if there were no grumblings about supervisors, if everybody in the office was patient with one another, kind towards one another or gentle with one another, especially when there are mistakes and disagreements? That doesn't exist anywhere. Now we see this in bits and pieces in places where God has been gracious, but for the most part this is unbelievably counter-cultural. Paul is saying, "You are to live in light of God's grace by living like this." And how he's telling them to live is utterly counter-cultural. "With gentleness, patience, humility and love." And then he finishes by saying, "Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit." Not just unified, but eager to maintain that unity. And he goes on to talk about why unity is so important and how it happens. In verse 4 he says, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that 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." He says "one" seven times. He's getting his point across. "Be unified. Eagerly maintain unity, because you're one in Jesus Christ." And it makes even more sense to know that he's saying these things to a church in Ephesus that is very, very ethnically diverse. One of the primary issues in this local church that he's writing to was how to be Jew and Gentile and yet become one as a church. They had all these Jews and all these Gentiles, and one of the primary reasons that he's writing is to communicate, teach them and encourage them how they are one in Jesus Christ, that there is neither Jew nor Greek anymore. There's one in Jesus Christ. He has brought down the dividing wall. "One died for all, and so all have become one in this One who has died." It's really profound. So this is a diverse church, so he's saying, "It speaks the gospel to the world when you are unified despite your diversity." When that marks the church, it really speaks loudly to people who are watching, it really speaks loudly to the culture that surrounds. Because nobody else does this. Differences typically divide.

And like the church in Ephesus, our little church family here is extremely diverse. God has been gracious to do that. Ethnically speaking, we are a family of Americans, Indians, Mexicans, South Americans, Africans, Europeans and Asians. In fact, someone who serves in our international student ministry sent me an e-mail this week that says that any given week, there is about 15 different ethnicities that attend here. It's almost like the book of Acts 2. It's really unbelievable the amount of diversity that is here ethnically speaking. So we have members who are brown, black, white. . .really white. We have all sorts of members. We have members of our body who are young and old. So not just ethnically, we have young and old, we have middle aged, we have toddlers, we have members who are white-collar, who are blue-collar. It's just across the board. We are a diverse congregation by God's grace. And yet despite all this diversity, we're one in Christ. We share the same Spirit. That is profound to think about. One is not more important than the other. And when this type of unity marks us despite our diversity, it speaks so beautifully to the world. And then you begin to see, as the Scriptures talk about, the beauty of Jesus Christ in Revelation coming to ransom for Himself a people of all tribes, tongues and languages. We get to taste that now, not to the degree that we will when the new heavens and new earth are here, but we have a foretaste of this reality, that God is ransoming for Himself a diverse church. It's not just going to be a bunch of white people or a bunch rich people. It's going to be a diverse body of believers. And you also begin to see, as you begin to dig into what Paul's saying here, why the sin of racism is so horrific to God, why the sin of classism is so horrific to God.

It should be horrific to us. Because in Christ, His power is magnified in diversity coming together and becoming one unified. It's beautiful. God has been so gracious to bring diversity, to establish diversity in our little body. We have prayed for that, and it's something that we should celebrate. We really should celebrate that we get to taste now in a small way what we will experience for eternity in the new heavens and the new earth. Just thank God for that, that He has done this, that He's doing this. And you see it in the service, you see it in the ministry teams, you see it the people who volunteer and serve on Sundays and you see it even in our deacon body. We have a diverse deacon body where we have an Asian deacon, a European deacon and we even have a redneck deacon. There really is a great degree of diversity that God has brought here, that God is establishing here and has cultivated here.

But even among diversity, there can still be segregation. Even with this diversity, there can still be segregation. I think for most of us, the inclination of our heart is always going to be to wander to those who are just like us. The drift is always going to be toward homogenization and not away from it. We're always going to want to sit by those who are like us, be in a group with those who are like us and be friends with those who are like us. And I'm not just talking about skin color here, although I am talking about that. I'm talking about age and everything else. We want to just silo ourselves off with people who are in the same life stage, who look like us, who think like us, who enjoy the same kind of music as us. That's always going to be the drift, and if we're not careful, we could actually become the most diverse yet segregated community in the entire city, which is not something that is fun for me to think about. I really am praying that God would keep us from that. There's a young man here who just graduated from college. He is not white, and the only reason I say that is to clarify what I'm trying to communicate through this illustration. One of the things he said to those who share the same ethnicity of him as he began to attend our services on Sunday is this. He told this group of friends, "I'm not going to sit with you at service. I'm not going to come and sit on a row with people who look just like me and have the same color of skin as me. I'm going to intentionally go to service, and I'm going to find people who are not like me. And I'm going to engage them. I'm going to join a home group with people who are not like me. I'm going to force myself to do this because I believe it will be better for me and better for our church family." What a mature and beautiful spirit that is. It's something that I hope God does among all of us.

So Paul is saying, "Church family, live in light of your calling, walk in a manner worthy of your calling. You do this by loving one another, by being humble toward one another, by being patient with one another and by being unified despite your diversity. You become one, and it communicates to the world beautiful things." And then in verse 7, he says, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." So even though we're to be unified, even though we're supposed to be one despite our diversity, he's saying, "There is a diversity that's in the church, and it's beautiful. And Christ has gifted the church in diverse ways." And then he's going to talk about these different gifts in verse 11. But before he does that, he almost slips into a reflective mode, and he quotes a psalm. In verse 8, he says, "Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'" (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)" So you're reading the flow of Paul's thought in this letter, and that pops out as a weird quotation or maybe a weird psalm to put in there. But to the readers, it would have made sense. In fact, one of the commentaries I was reading this week said this about this verse and about this quotation that Paul uses. It said, "Those who received this letter in the 1st

century might have understood this psalm to be speaking of Moses. After the Exodus, when the Egyptians were defeated and the Israelites were rescued from slavery, Moses went up on Mount Sinai and came down with the stone tablets of the law, the Torah. In line with several early Christian writings, Paul sees the ascension of Jesus as being in a sense like that of Moses. After the new Exodus, which had been achieved in Jesus' death and resurrection, setting the human race free from bondage to sin and death, Jesus went up into the heavenly realm. He ascended where He now reigns as Lord. And instead of coming down again with the law as Moses had done, Jesus returned in the person of the

Spirit, through who different gifts are now showered on the church." So to the early church, this may have made sense and this may have been what Paul was thinking. But regardless of what exactly he was thinking, his point is clear, that God has left the church a diversity of gifts.

And in verses 11-16, he shares what some of these gifts are, and then he shares what they're meant to do. So let's read verses 11-16 again, and we'll talk about these verses for the rest of our time. "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, 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 of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 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, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into 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." This is such a beautiful little portion of this letter, one that is often quoted, thought about and preached on, but what's Paul getting at here? We could dissect these verses and go really deep into them, but what's the main point that he's getting at in these verses? The main point that he's getting at is that he wants to encourage the church to grow up. He's saying, "Continue to grow up in Christ. Continue to build one another up in Christ." We see this in verses 15-16. ". . . we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into 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." And I don't think that he's saying it in a condescending way. He's not just saying, "You're so immature. You just need to grow up. Quit being a baby." He says that in other places in his letters. In other letters, he's very quick to say, "You need to grow up. You need to quit acting like babies and grow up." I don't think that's what he's saying here. I think he's just encouraging them, in the same way that I have a desire for my son to grow up, not because I think he's acting like a baby, but because I'm eager for him to experience certain things, to understand certain things and to walk in a certain amount of maturity.

And then he tells them how this growing up happens, what God has given the church to make it happen and why it even matters. So let's start with why it even matters. Why am I even up here? Why did Paul even write this? Why does it matter that the church grows up? Why does it matter that the church is building itself up in love? Look in verse 14 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, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." It matters that we grow up because, if we don't grow up, we may end up somewhere very far away from God, far away from the church, and that's not good. I think you have a perfect illustration of this with this little group in California who predicted the Rapture on May 21 st . This is what happens when people do not grow up and they're led away. They're tossed about by every wind of doctrine. What you have is this little group in California who have been led astray, and it's really sad to watch. And many of them continue to be led astray. This is the sort of thing that Paul is talking about. There are these deceivers, these people who are crafty and cunning, who can teach well and explain things well. And because this group is not growing up, they're susceptible to being led away from the faith. That's what Paul is talking about here. Lest you think this just happens in California in these little groups, I got an e-mail this week about a young woman who attends services at the Village who has now wandered away from our faith and joined a satanic cult. Her priest e-mailed us and was very condescending and belligerent. He just said, "Hey, I thought you would really like to know now that your daughter in the faith is over here with us. And if you want to check out what we believe, go to this website." And that's not out of the ordinary, just so you know. It's weekly that we receive prayer requests, phone calls and e-mails of this happening, of people who are not grown up in their faith. And because they're not, the wind and the waves come and sweep them away from the church, sweep them away from the gospel and ultimately sweep them away from God Himself, the God of the Bible. And it's sad, but we see it all the time. This is why it matters, so that this does not happen, by God's grace. If we're growing up together, if we're building each other up in love, this won't happen. And it's not just the false teaching that does this, although I think that's what Paul is

primarily talking about. I think circumstances do this was well. If you're not growing up in your faith, if you're not rooted and grounded in your faith, when the storm comes and you're not on a firm foundation, it's just going to be washed away. Your faith is going to be utterly washed away when these calamities, when these circumstances befall you that you don't understand, that you don't have a framework for. And if it's not deceitful teaching or circumstances, the lusts of the world can do this as well. It is weekly that we get prayer requests and we hear of men and women within our church who are Christians who are dating non-Christians. So these people who are Christians are writing in prayer requests asking us to pray for the person they're dating who is not a Christian. The Scriptures explicitly teach that Christians should not date and marry non-Christians. And yet, because of a desire to be loved, because of a desire to find comfort in another person, these people are led away into sin. And it's just heartbreaking, but it happens all the time. So why this matters is so that these things don't continue to happen. So Paul says, "This is why growing up matters."

And then he says, "This is how growing up in the church happens." Look at verse 16 with me. We grow up when "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 we grow up when every part of the body is being equipped and working properly, and when that happens, the church builds itself up in love. This is an amazing verse of Scripture to me. He's saying, "The body grows up, if our local church gets healthy and mature when each part of the body is working properly." So now that we're members of the same body, now that we're one, how you're doing matters to me and how I'm doing should matter to you. What you do on Friday night doesn't just matter to you anymore. It affects the rest of the body. We are knitted together in Christ as a church family. And because we are, how you are doing, whether or not you are working properly matters. It's the difference between us growing and us not growing. It matters corporately, in our home groups and across the board. I had a neat illustration of this last night as I was officiating a wedding. Before the bride walked down, the flower girl came down and then the two ring bearers came down. The flower girl came down these steep stairs, and she got down to the second to last step and stumbled and fell. She dropped her basket and all the flowers came out. And after she fell, she saw the flowers and just went berserk and ran down the aisle screaming. It was really sad, but at the time it was so cute. Now when the ring bearers came down, these two little boys were holding hands. As they're coming down these steep stairs, one of them trips as well and falls down. The one who didn't fall picks his brother up and they finish their walk together. They were one. They were knitted together in this moment, in this role. And they were going to make it to the end of the aisle together. So when the little brother fell, he didn't just leave him there and say, "Well, that's on you. I'm going to go do what I'm doing." No, because they were one, he waited, he picked him up, he helped him along and they finished their walk down the aisle. That's a wonderful picture of some of what Paul is getting at here. The way we grow up together is, as we're knitted to one another, we minister to each other. As we're equipped, we do the work of ministry together, we bless each other and we build each other up in love. John Stott, a Bible teacher, says, "God means for His church to be a community of support. 'Comfort one another,' Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians, 'encourage one another and build each other up.' The words 'one another' and 'each other' emphasizes the reciprocity of christian care. We are not to leave it to an elite of professional comforters or counselors. These have an important role to fulfill of course, but supporting, caring, encouraging and comforting are ministries which belong to all members of the Body of Christ." This is how the body grows up together, when every member is doing this, when we're all caring for one another, walking with one another, encouraging one another, slowing down for one another and picking each other up when we fall. It happens when you are equipped to minister, when we're doing this as a body, not when the pastors are up here preaching. As we'll see in a moment, this is a means to that end, and the end is the body building itself up in love.

And then Paul tells us what God has given the church to ensure that growing up like this happens. Look with me at 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. . ." When Christ ascended and the Holy Spirit came and showered the church with gifts, these gifts were given to ensure that the church could function in the way that we've been talking

about. This is why these gifts have been given. I really think that, for far too long, the focus has been on God's gifts to the church that Paul lists here instead of what these gifts were meant to do, which is equip the body to do the work of ministry. It's almost as if we believe at times that the entire purpose of God establishing the church is that so a few can be very visible and very special within it. We really do act like that. We act like God established the church so that these leaders could be influential and really special within the church and all of us could just sit and watch them. I'll just use Matt as an example since he's one of my best friends and he's our pastor. It amazes me the ways in which the Spirit has gifted him. I have just never seen anything like it. I honestly don't know if he could do anything else. He's so gifted to do what he does that I can't even imagine him doing anything else. It's just amazing to me. And there's a pedestal that people put him on both in our church and outside. Even these big leaders who are somewhat popular teachers do it. It's amazing for me to watch this from a friend's vantage point and see how we just exalt him and people like him. It's somewhat sad because, according to these Scriptures, the reason God has given Matt to us as a gift is to equip us to do the work of ministry and build each other up in love. He has not been given to us primarily so that we would be inspired, so that we would laugh at his jokes or so we would make some sort of Christian subculture celebrity out of him. He's a means to an end, and when we make him the end in and of itself, it's just a really immature way to view the church, to view his gift. He is a means to an end. The end is him equipping us to minister to one another, not to all come together and just be ministered to by him. That's not why God has given him to us as a church. God has given us this gift in Matt so that we can be ministers. And when we make him or anything and anyone else an end in itself, we stunt our growth as a church. It's really heartbreaking. So God has given him to us so that he can equip us.

I was reading a commentary this week that says, "The word Paul used for 'equipping' in the Greek is an interesting little word. The word is used in surgery for setting a broken limb or putting a joint back in its place. The basic idea of the word is of putting a thing into the condition of which it ought to be." That's what one of the Greek words for "equipping" means. I read this and thought immediately about when I played basketball in college. One of the drills we used to have in practice was the hamburger drill. We would have the guys on the court and the coach would throw up a shot and we would try to get the rebound. When you got the rebound, everybody would just foul one another, and there were no fouls called. You would try to put the ball back in. As soon as you did this, you got to be out. And of course I'm one of the shortest guy on the team and one of the weakest. So it was just not a good drill for me. So one of these times we were doing this drill, a guy named Moe came down from the rebound and his elbow hit my thumb, dislocating it. My thumb was literally down near my wrist. It was awkward. So I went to the doctor, and she tried a number of times to reset it and it kept falling out of place. But she eventually got it back into place, but what was she doing? She was making it right so that I could play basketball again. It's this idea of equipping. The commentary finishes by saying, "It's the function of these office bearers of the church to see that the members of the church are educated, guided, cared for and sought out when they go astray in such a way that they become what they ought to be." Because when we as members become what we ought to be, the church is built up in love, the church grows up and we're not as susceptible to the the winds and waves of false doctrine anymore.

So let me close by speaking to two different groups here: the covenant members and then those of you who are regular attenders. I see this happening in our church all the time. So I just want to encourage those of you who are covenant members that this is something that God is graciously doing among our body. I hear reports of this every week, and I'm always so encouraged about what He's doing in you and through you. So even tonight as I thought about encouraging you in this, I hope that you hear this more as a "continue to do what you're doing," not a "hey, you need to do something that you're not doing." I'm saying continue to walk in this, continue to be equipped so that we can build one another up in love. But let me just ask a few questions. If you're a covenant member, are you working properly as Paul outlines here? He says, "When all the members are working properly, the body is built up." Are you working properly? Are you working at all? Or are you just kind of here? Or if you're not working properly, why not? Is it just because you don't know any of this stuff? Maybe it's for lack of information. Maybe it's it's just because you're busy. Maybe you're honestly too

busy to learn to envelop your family into the church family, which I think we have got to learn to do. We are so good at just segregating our biological family off from the church, and we come as a family and go as a family but we never learn how to envelop our family into the church family. Maybe it's because you are fearful or because you have regret about some past sin in your life or current sin issues in your life. Maybe it's because you're wounded that you tried to do this at an old church and that church just used you. Maybe it's just because you're selfish. Maybe you are so self-absorbed in this season of your life that you are still thinking about yourself, your needs and what you want to do that you can't even see beyond yourself to see the church and how you might be used by God to encourage and build up the church. Or maybe it's because you're comfortable and to do some of this stuff would mean for you to get uncomfortable. On and on we could go, if you're not working properly, what is it? In what ways do you need to be equipped? We want to equip you better. We don't do a great job of this, but we want to. In what ways do you need to be equipped so that you could do some of these things and who are you going to let know that? Share that with somebody. Let's do this. Let's be equipped so that we can do the work of ministry and build one another up. We want to help you in whatever way we can. That's why we exist. That's why God has given you leaders, pastors and ministers, to do that.

And then in what ways has God already equipped you to build up our body? And I'm not just talking about handing out bulletins here. I'm not just talk about serving in preschool ministry, although I am talking about that. We do need people to help us pass out bulletins and serve in Little Village. Just a confession, it was really discouraging to me that with 750 members of our church here, I actually had to announce our need for help in Little Village twice. I feel like I should never have to announce that two weeks in a row. The moment we hear there is a need, it should be done. Now I know that's not the reality for some of these reasons I've named, but it should be the reality here. If our church needs help with preschool ministry, if you're a member, we're all called to preschool ministry. Because that's what the church needs, and we're a part of the church. But I'm not just talking about serving on ministry teams here on Sunday. I'm talking about the Spirit of God lives in you. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, it lives in you, and yet you're content to hand out bulletins. Some us not even that. How has He gifted you? How has He wired you to build up our church? Everything from the songs that we sing to the people who are singing to the background slides to the art in the foyer, all of this is done by members of our church who God has gifted in unique ways to build up the body through their gifting. How has He gifted you and how can it work itself out within our body, within your home group, within your community? We want to help facilitate that, encourage that and empower you to do that. So that's for those of you who are covenant members.

Now let me address the regular attenders. What I mean by regular attenders is those of you who attend here regularly but have no desire at all to join our church or any church. Even though you know that the Scriptures teach the necessity of church membership, you just want to come and stay on the fringes. I just want to encourage you here for a moment and speak to you specifically. The first thing I want to say is I'd love to invite you to be a part of our body or a part of some local church somewhere if it's not here. I just want to continue to extend that invitation to you because I think the Scriptures push you in that direction. Second, I just want to say this. If you've just decided to be a regular attender of the church who just comes on Sundays and that's it, you have absolutely no ability to be a part of what Paul is talking about here in this letter. You can't do what he says here. You have no ability to do that, and that's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking for you and for the local church, because neither you nor the local church is receiving the full range of benefits for what Christ saved you to. And that's a sad story. And what Paul is offering here is not just good advice to Christians. What he's saying here is, "This is how Christians live. If you've been called into Christ's family, this is what you do." It's not just great advice; it's actually God's command on our lives. So I just want to humbly encourage you to quit treating the local church like wine tasting. By that, I mean you'll go over to Denton Bible and taste the fine wine of Tom Nelson's teaching. And then you'll be done with that and come over here and just spend some time tasting what God's doing over here. And then a few years from now, because we do something that frustrates you, you'll go over to Cross Timbers and do the same thing there. You just treat the church like wineries, and you're just going to go wine tasting for the rest of your life. Jesus Christ loves the local church. He died for the church because He loves her. He gave His blood



for her. And so for you to treat the church like that is really not good. So I just want to encourage you to quit doing that. Whether that's here or somewhere else, be somewhere, dive in and quit being content with just tasting the wine and talking about how good it is. That's not what God has in mind. It's not what Paul is talking about here in this letter.

So I want to end by showing you a video of what this looks like fleshed out in the life of an individual. This is Sarah Damoff. She is a dear sister in the Lord, a good friend and someone who was here in Denton and a part of our church for a season. She came to school here and had her life transformed. So all these things that Paul is talking about, she really now offers a great picture of what could be as we continue to ask the Lord to do this. So this is Sarah. That's such a great picture of what I think happens when we as a church body function in the way that Paul talks about in Ephesians 4.

Let's pray. "Father, thank You for Sarah. We thank You for the picture that she is, of the hope of our body being built up together in love. She's one testimony of so many that we could show, of how You do this and how You are doing this among us as we, motivated by Your Spirit, love each other and build each other up. So I pray that ever more You would compel us to do this, that You would make us into a body who lives and walks in light of the calling that we have received with humility, with gentleness, with patience and with love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. I pray that You would teach us to love and build each other up through Your Spirit. So as we come now and respond to what we've heard, all of this is possible because of Jesus and His example in this. I pray that You would bless us and nurture and nourish our hearts as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

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