

We Proclaim Grace Upon Grace Through Equipping the Saints

Ephesians 4:12-13

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, July 12, 2020

Well, hello everyone it is so good to see you here today. This is the first time we've had a service in some time now. It's been about, I think it was said earlier today, since March 15. If you can believe that, March 15 since we had a worship service on a Sunday morning; and even since we've had so many people in the same room together, so it is so good to see your faces and a blessing to have you here with us. And I also want to say a special welcome to those who are watching this online. A number of our people couldn't make it today due to the restrictions related to COVID-19; and so we're so grateful that you are joining us online on the internet there on our YouTube channel. I also want to mention that if you are joining us online, there is room for you to come; or at least there's room to sign up. We have two facilities we can use for these recordings. We have one here in the auditorium. We also have another one in the gymnasium next door. So, we can have 50 people here; we can have 50 people in the room next to us. There is a lot of space, so we would encourage you, if you weren't able to make it, please sign up. If we're not able to accommodate everyone, what we're going to do is have two services. That is something we are willing to do, but we just need to know how many people are interested in coming. So please sign up next week if you're interested at all in being here, and we would love to try to accommodate you for that.

Also, before we get started this morning, I want to thank Quentin Smith for preaching for us these past three weeks. For those of you who were able to hear Quentin, he did an excellent job, didn't he? It was very much a blessing in the word that he brought to us. When I asked him to preach for me over the summer, he said he would; but I didn't know he had that much material. I didn't know he was ready to say that much, but he did a wonderful job. If you missed those messages, he preached a series on how to tame the tongue in James 1. He preached a series on how to honor the Lord with what we say, with what comes out of our mouth, because that's where most of our trouble comes from. And that's where most of our sin is found. It's found in the mouth. So, we did a series on that. If you missed it, it's on our YouTube channel; so please check that out. Go type in gracefellowshipchilliwick.com, and you will see it up there. It is a blessing to have such wonderful resources as a church.

Speaking of the church, I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to a book that talks about that. It talks about the church and the importance of being together; and that is the book of Ephesians. So, if you would turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, because that's the book we're in today and we are in chapter four.

While you're turning there, I want to introduce our passage for today by talking about something we haven't looked at in a while. I want to talk about something that it's been a little while since we've mentioned it, and that is our vision statement as a church.

As some of you will remember, when I was at the Grace Advance Academy several years ago, they asked us to write a vision statement that talked about where we're going as a congregation. What we would like to see, kind of a projection for the future; and since we're back together again, I thought it'd be a good time to talk about that. Since things are getting back to normal meeting on Sundays, it would be a good time to look at that together because let's just be honest, it's been a strange time as a church, hasn't it? It's been weird. Things have probably never been so odd, and it's not over yet. At least from what we're hearing in the news, there's more to come. So, this is a good time to talk about what we're trying to accomplish in the midst of that. A lot of normal things can't happen in the life of the church right now. In fact, I looked it up on the calendar and right now we're supposed to be getting ready for youth camp and Vacation Bible School. Well, we can't do that. There is no opportunity for those things, and so let's talk about the vision and what we're trying to do in this strange time.

The opening paragraph of the vision statement, it's up here on the screen. It says

Our vision is to proclaim "grace upon grace" to Chilliwack, British Columbia and to the ends of the earth. John 1:16-17 says, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ."

At Grace Fellowship, we believe that salvation is all of grace and not of works. We believe it is something that God alone accomplishes in our lives, and nothing we contribute to ourselves. We believe it is unmerited favor, where Jesus earns the Father's approval and, in His mercy, gives us the benefits of that through His shed blood on the cross and victorious resurrection from the tomb. Since we have received all of this, it is our vision as a church to proclaim grace upon grace in several ways:

They're up here as well. We've got them in listed for you. These are also on our website, by the way, if you want to check it out on our website, but here are some ways we proclaim grace as a church.

We proclaim grace upon grace through the Bible, and through worship. We do this through evangelism and through service. We proclaim God's grace through counseling and leadership. And finally, the last point here is we proclaim grace upon grace, through equipping the saints.

This is our vision as a church; this is what we're trying to do. We want to proclaim God's grace to people. We want to tell them salvation is all of God and not of us. It's all by His mercy. Now, I was talking with a neighbor the other day who heard that I was a Christian. They heard I was a pastor and so they wanted to talk to me about that. And they said, "It's all so confusing." That's how they started off the conversation. They said, "Nobody knows what's right and wrong anymore, and nobody knows what the Bible is trying to say. This is all so confusing." I told him very gently as kindly as I could. "Well, it's not really that confusing. The Bible's not that confusing. It's very clear on what it's trying to tell us. It's telling us about God's grace. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came to pay for our sins, die on the cross, and rise again that we could have life in Him. The question is, do you want to believe that? And the question for you is will you receive that?"

I didn't get all of that out in the conversation, but that's where I was trying to take it. But that's our vision as a church and that's what we're trying to tell people. We want to tell them about Jesus. We want to tell them about His mercy because the message is clear. I'm afraid sometimes people talk like that today because we've made the message so confusing. I'm afraid people talk like my neighbor did because we've muddied the waters so much, but the Bible is not that hard to understand. It tells us about grace. And this morning we're going to talk about how to do that through the next point in our vision statement. The final part of the statement says this, we've talked about those other points before, but here's the final paragraph; it says,

We proclaim grace upon grace through equipping the saints. Because we are called to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, it is our vision to see our people equipped for the work of ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12 says, "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." This is what it all boils down to: God wants us to be involved in His church. This is where it all leads: He wants us equipped to serve His people. We are saved by grace in order to work (Ephesians 2:8-10). We are forgiven and pardoned and given new life in Christ so that we might go out and minister to others in a lost and dying world.

Just to say a few words about that last paragraph there. One thing we all understand, one mark of a healthy church is discipleship, right? One mark of a healthy church is that it is equipping its people to do something. They don't just show up on Sunday morning and sit there like knots on a log. They don't just come in like robots and go out without any interaction with each other. They work. They're busy interacting with each other's lives. To say it another way, one mark of a healthy church is life. The church is alive because you see that; you see the people doing ministry. And we've all seen churches that do nothing, and when we leave, we say, "That church is" what? "That church is dead," right? We've all seen churches that don't care anymore. They

have no passion in what they do. They have no excitement, and we say the same thing. You know, God has forsaken that place.

And that's what the next part of the vision statement does. It tells us how to prevent that. It tells us how to avoid that sort of thing in the church, and you avoid it by equipping people. You avoid it by training them up for ministry. If you notice, in the statement, it quotes from Ephesians 4, which we're going to talk about in just a moment, and it says this, "This is what it all boils down to: God wants us to be involved in His church. We are saved by grace in order to work. That statement actually has two parts to it. It comes in two steps. First, you're saved by grace, and then you work. You're saved by God's mercy. You're forgiven and free in Christ. And as a result, you have some excitement about it. You have some passion about what God has done in your life. You don't want to mix those two steps up. You don't want to get them backwards and put the works first. The works never come first. The grace comes first; works come second, but they always go together. And it's the job of the church to train you in that. It's the job of the church to build that up in you. Just like a farmer helps his crops to grow, so the church helps its people grow. It doesn't make them grow. It doesn't do the work for them, because it can't, but it does build that up in them. And that's what we're going to talk about next in the book of Ephesians. That's where we find ourselves this morning because as we've gone through this book, verse by verse; as we've studied it over the past several months, we now come to chapter four. We now come to the passage that was quoted in our vision statement, and if you want to read it with me Ephesians 4:11-13 says this,

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

Just to explain that a little bit, I told you before that chapter four marks a transition in the book of Ephesians. It marks a break from what was said before, because Ephesians can be divided into two parts. It talks about your position in Christ, and then it talks about your practice of that. It talks about who you were when God saved you, and it tells you about what you are to do now in response; and the break happens here in chapter four. So, the first half, it talks about God has adopted you and He's redeemed you and sealed you with His Spirit. Then the second half of the letter talks about how to practice that. It talks about your marriage, and your family, and your home. And as Paul is describing this, as he's walking you through what that means, he says it's the church's job to help you with that. It's the church's job to help you put your doctrine into practice. It's the church's job to help you live out the Christian life. Verse 11, says, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for this." It means he gave you the leaders of the church for this reason. In other words,

the church is not here to just teach and teach to teach you all the time. I mean, your leaders are not here just to talk and talk and talk and talk. They're here to train you to work.

They're here to help you do something. Church is an active thing. It's not a passive thing. Church is something you come to do, it's not something you just show up for. That's the reason the church can survive during a pandemic, amen. Because it's not about whether you can come in here and listen to a sermon or not. That's not the point of the church. That's part of it, but it's not the most important thing. The most important thing is you invest in each other's lives. And you can do that at home. You can do that in the grocery store. You can do that at work. You don't have to come in here.

You know, I'll never forget the first time I saw this passage because it was posted on the wall of a large church in California. It was placed right above the steps leading up to the offices where the pastors worked, to remind them that this is what they are to do. Every day they came to work, they saw this right above their eyes to remind them, this is their job. They're here to train people for ministry. That's their number one priority. It comes before everything else. I'll also never forget this passage because I saw it during one of the few times I got to meet John MacArthur. I saw it during one of the times I got to talk to him in seminary because it was right above his head as we talked. It's in the lobby of His church there in Los Angeles; and I remember, as we were talking, I thought, "Okay, I get it now. I get what he's trying to do. His goal is to equip people for the work. He wants to make disciples." That's what we're all supposed to be doing. Warren Wiersbe said, "The Christian life is a battleground. It's not a playground." It's for war; it's not for games. The church is here to prepare you for that. It's here to prepare you for war.

We get so shocked when the world turns upside down, don't we? We get so blown away when lost people act like they're lost. And sometimes I feel it's a failure on my part because I'm supposed to prepare you for that. My job is to get you to get ready to go out and go to war with a lost and dying world. So, if you're taking notes in Ephesians 4, we're going to talk about this by looking at three reasons why you should come to church. That's our outline for today. That's, that's what it's about. If you're taking notes in Ephesians 4:12-13, we're going to see three reasons why you should come to church. And we're going to talk about that because this is a big deal.

This is a major issue because people come to church for so many reasons. They come for so many different things, some of them good, some of them bad. But the Bible makes it clear here, we're to come to be trained up to do something. There's a big difference between attending church and being involved in it. There's a big difference between showing up and plugging in. And we need to come to plug in. That's what God wants of us, and we're going to talk about that this morning with three reasons why you should come to church.

The first reason is to be equipped. If you're taking notes, the first reason why you should come to church is to be equipped, which means you should come to church to be trained. We've said a little bit about this, but you should come to church to learn how to do something for the Lord. You're not here as an observer; you're here as a participant. You're not here as just part of the audience, you're here as part of a body. And we're all in this together. And if you read in verses eleven through twelve, this is what it says. It says,

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.

Just a few thoughts on this, but as you read that you can tell verses eleven through sixteen, they're one long sentence in Greek. Ephesians is a book that's just kind of divided up into a series of really long sentences. And this is one of them. It starts in verse eleven and goes to verse sixteen because it's one big thought in the mind of Paul. And the thought is that this is what the church is here to do. This is why God gave you the church, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

If you notice, those are three prepositional phrases there. That the word “for” is repeated several times, because this is what the church is here for. This is why God gave it to us to put you to work. It's not here for games. It's here for work. It's not here for you to keep up your tradition or your habit or whatever that kind of thing. It's here for you to serve.

Just to tie this into another part of this passage, if you look up in verse seven, right above this, Paul says, “But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.” I told you before that could be translated “To each one of us, a *gift* was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.” Which means to each of us God gave a spiritual gift. God gave us special talents and the point is God wants you to use it now. He wants you to put your gifts into practice. He didn't give you your spiritual gifts to sit on them; He gave them to apply them.

I've had a lot of people ask me through the years, maybe you have as well, “How do I know what my spiritual gift is? How do I tell?” And the answer is simple. You need to serve the church. That's how you can tell. And the people, if they're doing their job, they'll tell you what your gift is. They will tell you if you can't sing. Right? They will tell you if you can't preach. Charles Spurgeon heard a man preach one time and the man said, “Well, I'm called to preach.” And he said, “Well, you may be called to preach but no one's called the listen to that.”

You've got to serve a church; that's how you find out. I've had other people say, “I don't feel satisfied in my Christian life; I don't feel like I'm getting enough out of this.” And you have to ask the question. Are you using your gifts? Are you serving the church? Because you'll never feel satisfied if you're not. You'll never feel like you're doing enough because that's what the

church is here for. It's here for you to serve. And the passage says you get involved this way. You plug into the church this way, by being equipped for ministry.

The word “equip” here is the Greek word *katartismos*. It means to prepare or be trained up for something. In the Greek it's an interesting word, because it can also mean to set a bone in place. It was a medical term that meant to put a bone back in place after it came out of socket, to put it back in order again; and Paul says it's the job of the church to do that. It's the job of the church to put people back in order again. The idea here is that God created us to serve. He created us to help each other, that was the original design. That's what He made you to do, but sin got in the way and ruined that. Sin came in and messed you all up, and it's the job of the church to put that back the way it's supposed to be. The church helps us do what God made us to do.

You know, if you think about it, we all do this, but we come into the church every week selfish, don't we? You guys know what I'm talking about. We come into the church every week thinking about ourselves, and it's the job of the church to change your mind. You know, you come in thinking the world revolves around you, you come in thinking you're the king of the universe, the king of the castle, and it's our job every week to tell you that you are not. You are just a rotten stinking sinner, just like the rest of us. And then you come back next week, and you know what? We say it to you again. Next week, you come in thinking, “Well, I'm the smartest person in the room. I'm the godliest person in the room. I'm certainly godlier than this guy over here. They should be so glad to have me. They should be so honoured.” And it's our job to tell you that no, that's not the case. Take you down a notch. The church is oftentimes it's in the deep deflating business, not in the inflating business. We're here to humble.

Just to put that in perspective, you know, I mentioned the spiritual gifts to you before in verse seven. We saw them up there, but did you know that the New Testament lists fifteen spiritual gifts? Fifteen of them, and not a single one of them is selfish. Not a single one of the spiritual gifts was given for the benefit of you. They're all given for the benefit of others. They're all given to help other people, so there's no way you could be prideful about that. You could add to this that when you look at all the gifts in the New Testament, when you look at the spiritual gifts and take a survey of them, not a single one of them is given in isolation. Not a single one of them was given when you're all alone. They're all given to be used when there are other people around. And it's a job of the church to help you see what that means, which leads to a couple applications here.

There are several ways you can apply this to your lives. For one thing, this means you need to be using your gifts. That's pretty obvious. That's pretty self-explanatory, but when you come to church, you need to come with a servant's mindset and not as a master. You don't come into church for everybody else to serve you, you come to serve them. You don't come to church to get your needs met; you come to meet the needs of others by using your gifts. You don't come to sit

and sit and sit and then go home; you don't come to learn and learn and learn and then do nothing with it. You come to take what you're learning and apply it. I think you've heard me say this before, but the most miserable people I've known are those who just come to church and sit here. I counsel them endlessly; I counsel them all the time. The most unhappy people I've known are those who just come to church and think about themselves, but the most joyful people I've known are those who come and serve others. The most joyful people I've met are those who come and use their gifts. Why? Because that's how God intended it to be. That's how God designed His church.

The New Testament commentator, H.A. Ironside, he said, "Don't come to church to be a spiritual sponge that soaks it all up and does nothing with it. You need to come to get filled up and let the Lord do some squeezing." You need to come to church to take what you've learned and give it to others. That's how you apply the teaching of the New Testament. For a good example of this in the in the 1800s, D.L Moody was a very famous man. He did a lot of work for the Lord, but he was uneducated. He had no formal training; he could barely read. So, what he would do is this. He would go to church in the morning and listen to a sermon, and then in the afternoon, he would go out into the street and the railway yards of Chicago and preach it to the poor. He would go out every afternoon and preach that same sermon; he would just repeat it verbatim to the poor kids that couldn't come to church. In other words, he came to get trained. He came in order to be equipped and we all need to do that. He wasn't a gifted teacher, but he was a gifted evangelist; and he used that for the glory of God. We all need to be doing that today.

This leads us to another application for this. Another way to apply this to our lives and that is we need to come to church to learn. That's another simple one there; it doesn't need a lot of explanation, but you need to come to church to learn. Even if you're a Christian for a long time, you can still learn something, right? They say, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Well praise the Lord you're not a dog. You're a human being. I mean, even if you've been saved and been in church for a while, there's still room to grow. Matter of fact, if you are growing in Christ, I tell you what's happening to you. Every week you're coming in and learning something. Every day you're waking up and learning something. That's another way to apply this.

You know, to make this real practical for a moment to tie this into our life as a church. You know, normally we would do this to our regularly scheduled ministries. I mean, normally, we teach and equip you through our regular programs. Things like our children's ministry and our youth ministry. You know, we do this through sermons and our spring conference and our weekly Bible studies that meet in people's homes; but all that's on hold right now. You know, that's kind of on the shelf with the Coronavirus. So, we've had to be creative with this. We've had to think outside the box. And so, what we've done is we've made a lot of personal visits right now. That's one way we're equipping saints for the work of the ministry. We're meeting with a lot of people one on one. You may know this or not, but we regularly meet as an elder board to

talk about who have you visited lately? “Who have you seen? What's going on in their life? What do we need to be aware of?” So, we don't miss anybody. We're also doing a lot of things on the internet. We're doing ministries like our men's and women's Bible study online and over Zoom. Some of us, I think, we feel like we need to get a PhD in Zoom after this is over. I'm on that thing all the time. But that's one way we're ministering. It's one way to have ministry in people's lives. Some of us are praying over the phone, we have some of our ladies every week that pray over the phone. You know, counseling is happening, discipleship is happening; but none of that will do you any good if you're not teachable. That's the idea here. None of that will do with any of us any good if we don't have a humble heart.

I remember when I applied for seminary years ago, I asked the director of placement. I said, “Do you guys ever reject anybody from the school? Do you guys ever turn anybody away?” And I'll never forget what he said because he said, “Yes, we reject unteachable people.” He said, “We reject people that know it all already because we can't help them. If their mind is already made up on whatever the issue is, we don't let them come.” There's a similar parallel to the church, and that is that we can't help you if you're not teachable. If you've got your mind made up already, you have to have a humble heart.

It leads to another point to talk about today. Another reason why you should come to church. The first one is to be equipped. The first reason why you should come to the churches to be trained up to do something. That's how Paul starts this off; that's where he begins. We don't come to church to observe merely, we come to participate. It leads to another point to consider, a second reason why you should come to church and that is to work. Going right along with that, a second reason why you should come to church is to work. Which means you should come ready to take action. You should come ready to do something for the Lord.

It's been said that you don't come to church to sleep, you come to sweat. And that's what Paul goes on to say, Paul, who knew more about this than anybody, by the way, he's writing from a prison cell. He's writing from a place where he is sweating, under pressure and under persecution; so he's living this out as he's saying this, but he says in verses eleven through twelve,

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.

As you read on in the passage, as you can tell, Paul is building up to something here. He's constructing an argument and the argument is this. First, he mentions being equipped and then he tells you what you're equipped *for*. First, he mentions being trained and now he tells you *what* you're trained to do. And he says you're being trained to serve. You see the word “serve” in here. You're being trained to work, not just any type of work, but the work of service. Some of your

translations will say the work of ministry there; it's the same idea. And to explain that, the word "work" here, it's *ergon* in Greek and it means everything. The English word means to toil or labor for something; to exert yourself. It also gives an idea of sacrifice. Self-denial, you can't work without denying yourself. You can't work without sacrificing giving yourself to others. When you go to work and get a paycheck, what that paycheck represents is you sacrificed yourself this week for the company and here's your income. That's why sometimes we complain about our check, right? Well, it wasn't worth that, right?

Paul says you need to do that for the church. And the way this is worded here, it's actually an encouragement to read because it means anyone can do this. The way he writes this, there's no qualifications to this, which means no matter who you are, where you come from, you can work because anybody can make a sacrifice; anybody can serve. You don't have to be a Christian for a long time before you do this. I mean, if you think about it, you may not be able to give a lot of money to the church or make a large donation, but you can do something. You can wait tables and stack chairs. You might not be able to sing or be up on stage in front of everybody, but you can visit the sick and pray for them. You can do things behind the scenes like serving the nursery, helping with the kids. That's what this text says. There's a place for everyone to serve.

In fact, we need to talk about this a little bit because there's been a dangerous idea floating around in recent years that's really distorted this. There's been a dangerous doctrine that's really gotten this backwards that we need to discuss because some of you might have come from this background, but it's the doctrine of clericalism. The doctrine of clericalism. Clericalism is a fancy word that says that the work of the ministry is only to be done by the clergy or the leaders. It's only to be done by these guys in verse eleven that we just read about, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The idea is "Well, that's what we pay them for, that's what we give them a check for. They do the work, we watch. They do the work on our behalf." It creates a divide in the church between the clergy and laity. I don't know if you've ever been to a Roman Catholic church service before but that's what you see when you're there. The priest does everything. You don't do anything. You just sit there and then you go home. And that was an interesting point of the Protestant Reformation when the Reformation happened. They said, "No, the Bible teaches a priesthood of believers. It teaches that everyone can serve in the church." And they turned the whole thing on its head. That's what this says here. This is what the Bible does teach. The Bible says everyone can serve. Everyone can work in the church, not just the priests, but the people too. Not just the clergy but the laity as well.

Which means on some level, let me tell you what this means. This means the church should be uncomfortable for you. This means on some level, the church should be hard because work is that way, right? Work is uncomfortable. Work is hard. You can't just sit here while someone else does everything. You can't just show up like a knot on the log and go home. You need to be stretched. That's another way this applies. You need to be challenged when you come in here

because work does that as well. I'm afraid that sometimes as your leadership team, we miss the boat on this. I'm afraid sometimes as your elders we get this wrong because we make church too easy for you. I feel like sometimes we don't expect enough because church should wear you out at times. Not just VBS, but church. (I'm thinking about VBS because we were getting ready for it this time last year.) But church should be exhausting because you come here to serve.

Amy Carmichael once said that “When I consider the cross of Christ, how can anything I do ever be considered a sacrifice?” She's right. Nothing we do can ever be enough. For our Savior, nothing is too hard for Him. And you guys get this. I think you do a great job of this. I mean, I've talked to people from our church who tell me they're worn out after a Sunday. I mean, they're tired because they're giving themselves in ministry, You guys do a great job of that. I've talked to other ones who have said, “You know, I'm not sure if I can get to everything right now, I don't know if I can do everything that's being asked of me, but I want to try.” That's what Paul is talking about here. We need to work and serve others.

That least one more point to talk about in our passage for today. One more reason why you should come to church, just to review these other ones. The first one is you should come to church to be equipped. You should come to church to be trained and learn how to do something with your gifts. And second, you should come to work. The second reason you should come to church is to be ready to take action. See a need, you meet it. See a problem, you try to help. This is a priesthood of believers. We can all serve the Lord; there's something for all of us to do, and at least one more point to consider for today. One more reason why you should come to church, and that is to build up the body of Christ.

A third and a final reason why you should come to church that really puts all this together is you should come to build up the body of Christ, which means that you come so people will see Jesus in you. That's what Paul's after here. That's his greatest point here. You should come so they will see Him and give Him glory. It's the most amazing thing about this passage, but they should see Him in you. And if you read on it says,

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.

I've told you before that Paul is building an argument here. He's working up to something. And the argument is that God does all of this in chapter four. He does all of these things that we've talked about. He saves us, gives us a church, gives us spiritual gifts for this reason, for this purpose, to build up the body of Christ. Which means this is not about you, this is about Christ. This is not about your desires and your glory and your reputation. None of that. This is about

His. You don't come to church to get a paycheque, but you do come to church to give glory to Christ.

Another way to say that is that God is in the construction business. He's not in the destruction business. God is putting things up; He's not just tearing them down. And we need to remember that in the way we talk to other people. We need to remember that in how we conduct ourselves; and God is using us to do this. That's the encouraging part of the passage, this is the blessing. God is using you of all people to build His church.

You can really get a taste of what this is like if you live in Chilliwack right now. You can really get a feel for this because there's a lot of building going on around the city, right? I mean, everywhere you go, there's just houses popping up. We were driving to church this morning. I was thinking about this passage, and I was pointing out to my wife and kids, "There's another one. There's another one." I mean, all the buildings that have come up since we've moved here. You're seeing the city built before your eyes. And Paul says God's doing the same thing with the church. He's doing the same thing with His people. He is building it before your eyes.

The way he says this is touching. This is a moving statement because he calls the church His body. That's the word *sōmatos* in Greek. It means frame or outer man, and this is how deeply you are involved in this. Paul says this is how close you are to Jesus; you are His body. You are like His outer man. You don't just believe in Jesus, but you're part of Jesus. You don't just trust in Him, but you're one with Him. Theologians refer to this as our union with Christ or our oneness with Him. Because if you think about it right now, Jesus is in heaven. His body is at the Father's side, so people can't see Him. They can't reach out and touch Him, but they can reach out and touch you. They can see you and as they see you, it should make them think of Him. As they watch you and see how you handle all the trials and difficulties of life and the crazy stuff like the Coronavirus, it should make them think of your Saviour. It's been said that you may be the only Jesus your neighbor ever sees. God believes that; it's how God builds His church. That's how He creates it. By using us to do it, which is what the rest of the passage says, If you read on, it says,

To the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

As you read that, that's kind of hard to read, it's some deep stuff in here; but what Paul is saying is that the building process of the church will continue until we're fully united. It will continue until the church is one. It says "Until we attain to the unity of the faith and to a mature man." That means the church will continue until it's mature. I think we all understand the church is not mature right now. We all agree with that. It has a lot of room to grow, long way to go. So, it'll continue until that day. It says, "To the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of

Christ.” That means it’ll continue to grow until we are full of Christ until every part of us looks just like Him. It’s a reference to heaven here. You won’t perfectly look like Christ until you’re in heaven, and the idea is that the church will continue until you reach that final day.

I think a lot of people are worried today about the church. They’re worried that it’s getting so sideways, it’s getting so backwards and messed up, and they’re afraid it’s going to disappear. I mean the way you hear some Christians talking, you know, we’re right around the corner from the church being wiped out by the world. Let me tell you something, the church will never be wiped out by the world. Ever. It says so right here. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says,

I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

It’s quite a statement there. Listen, we got some terrible things being thrown at us today. You got some horrible things coming at the church. Things from the media, things sometimes from the government, things from cults and false Christians; but Jesus says even hell itself won’t stop this. It’ll continue until the end, which leads me to ask, do you believe that today? Do you get that? Do you believe that God will stay with His church? Do you believe that it will continue until the end and hell itself won’t stop it?

I ask you that because you’re not going to make it through this crazy world if you don’t. I ask you that because you’re going to have to believe if you’re going to persevere and not give up because this world is just too evil otherwise. But God will stay with His church; He will never abandon it.

To ask us another way and take it back to how we started the sermon this morning. Is this why you come to church today? Is that what brought you here? Are you here out of love for Christ? Are you in church today because you want to be more like Him? I ask you that remember, because a lot of people are coming to church for other reasons. A lot are coming to church for all kinds of different things, but what about you? Why did you come to church today? Because if you came out of love for Christ, this is how you should respond. If you came out of care for Him, this is what you need to do. You need to be ready to work. You need to be ready to give your life in service to others. Christ gave all He had for you; you need to give all you had for them. He held nothing back when he saved you; you need to hold nothing back when you come. You need to do it all for Him.

During the Crimean War in the 1800s, Florence Nightingale was helping a soldier who was dying. She was a nurse in the war, and she worked in Istanbul helping men who had come back from the frontline. On one occasion, she was helping a soldier who was in really bad shape; and she called for help. She called out for a minister, but the man said, “No, that’s okay. I don’t need

a minister. You can stay here because you are like Christ to me.” He said, “Please stay here because you remind me of Jesus.”

Friends, that's my prayer for our church. I think that's what we all want to see here at Grace Fellowship. We want to be Christ to this community. We want to make people think of Jesus. When they come in here, I want them to come in here and say, “I don't know how that happened.” And we can tell them, “I know exactly how that happened. Christ did.” That's our vision for our church. That's what we're here to do.

And let me pray for us, that the Lord would help us in this. Let me pray that He would help us to be like Jesus to a lost world. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we've come to a big passage this morning. I think there are so many big passages in the book of Ephesians, and so many that we really can't say enough about. This is one of those. We read this and our hearts are humbled because who is worthy of something like this? And yet the way Paul has written this, the way You've inspired by Your Holy Spirit. It sounds like we can all do this in Christ. If we've trusted in Him for salvation, we can live up to these commands.

I pray You would help us to do this as a church. Lord, help us to go out and work for the glory of God. Help us as leaders to train our people, our people to grow, help us all to grow in the image of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I think I speak for everyone here, Lord, when I say thank You for Your church. There's not a believer in this room, who would be who they are in Christ if it was not for the church. So, we thank You for that. We thank You for the faithful churches around the world right now during these bizarre times. Thank You for the faithful churches in Chilliwack. We pray, Lord, You would help us to be faithful too.

Lord thank You for our Savior. For those who are not saved this morning, Father, I pray You would prick their hearts and I pray they would be convicted of what they're missing. And for those who are saved, Lord, I pray they would go out encouraged and built up in the faith so they could go out and build up the body of Christ.

Thank You that we're back together again. Lord, we pray this will be a sign of more of this to come that we would see one another more often; and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.