

MBC - 1/19/2020 - Pastor Doug Thompson
 A 20/20 VISION FOR MBC
 Pt.2 - "Looking Inward"

When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven, He took His physical body with Him, and He will forever have that body, scars and all. But in another sense, He left His body here on earth - in His church! And Jesus left His church everything we need, to be everything He wants us to be. Let's look at it together—

- Ephesians 4:11-16 ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until 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, ¹⁴so 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. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from 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.

Last Lord's Day we looked at the church in Antioch (in Acts 13) It was a strong, healthy church - their compass pointed in all the right directions: **Upward** - they were a God-centered, worshipping, church; **Inward** - they put a high priority on teaching, training, loving, caring, meeting the needs of their church family, and beyond. They were all about the **Outward**: they were the first missionary sending church in the Bible; and they prioritized the **forward**, in the way they trained up leaders and teachers and sent out their top men as missionaries. This is why I call the church at Antioch the best church in the Bible.

If we want MBC to be this kind of church, we have to work and sometimes fight to keep these 4 priorities front and center, or we will drift. We will. Churches do, pastors do. I just read this

- "A Sunday service that is part therapy session, part standup-comedy routine, and part live concert. . . . This is not your grandmother's idea of church!" That's how PBS *Newshour* began their recent segment on New Abbey Church in Pasadena, California. The segment on this LGBTQ-affirming church shows a standup comedian opening for a female pastor who talks about her wife to a crowd of hipster congregants. The church was founded by pastor Cory Marquez, *who left a large evangelical church* when he realized why young people weren't coming: they didn't find it "relevant" to their needs.

Now this guy is a heretic: he rejects the Gospel. Jesus didn't die on the cross to save us from our sins, God loves everyone as they are - no one needs to be saved - but he was at one time on staff at a Gospel-preaching church! What happened? Something about their compass was off.

*Beloved, we need to have a *holy fear* that we don't drift from what God has called us to do and be. I think of Jesus warning the churches in Revelation 2&3: Real churches that existed in the first century, local churches just like MBC - but some of them were beginning to drift. This is what Jesus said to His church at Ephesus—

- Revelation 2:4-5 ⁴But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the

works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Jesus said this, to His own church, because they were drifting. That sends a chill down my spine. It could happen to us - it will happen to us unless we keep these 4 priorities—

Last Lord's Day we looked at our **upward** focus - the vertical: to be God-centered, God saturated; always striving to purify and elevate our thoughts about God - to think biblically about God; to worship Him, and serve Him and honor Him as He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture. People should walk in here and say, "God is in this place!" Amen? How are we doing?

This morning we want to look at the **inward** - you could call this the church's *self-care*. Think about this: it was only because the church at Antioch was such a healthy church that they were able to have the incredible missionary outreach that they did.

- Churches that are up to their eyeballs in conflicts and strife and petty stuff don't have any energy left for outreach. Churches that are spiritually immature aren't motivated to for evangelism, or sending out missionaries or planting churches.

Baby Christians just want their baby food, and their binkies - they just want to be taken care of!

*I'll give you some insider information here - keep it confidential: Pastors in churches like these have a term for what they do. It's called a "*hand-holding ministry*:" the people just want their pastors to hold their hands, and wipe their noses and take care of them. And *not* get involved in anything that takes them away from that - like outreach and missions.

We call these churches *ingrown* - like the toenail - they don't want to grow or change - honestly, they don't care about reaching the lost, because they just want to be comfortable with their own little group: us four, no more, shut the door.

- Now we do hold hands and wipe noses, but that's not all we do! The church *is* like a hospital - we take care of the sick and wounded, absolutely we do that. And we love to do that. But we're also like a spiritual gymnasium, getting our people strong in love and strong in truth, to send them back out to the front lines to do battle for the Gospel!

So what does it mean to be a strong, healthy local church, and what do we need to do to get there? Let's start with the goal and then work backwards to see how we get there. Look with me again at our passage in Eph.4 -

I. The goal: together, to be like Jesus.

- Ephesians 4:11-16 ¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

These are the *gifted men* that Jesus gave to His church: the apostles and prophets received, spoke, and wrote down revelation from Jesus - and when the NT was complete, their role ceased, and they passed the baton on to the evangelists, who go out and plant churches, and the shepherds and teachers who plant themselves in those churches to faithfully preach and teach God's Word. What is the purpose all of these men serve?

- ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for *building up the body of Christ*, ¹³until 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, (3 times he mentions Christ)¹⁴so that (here is the result) 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. (We won't fall for the junk-theology that is all over the internet and TV and radio) ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, *we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*, ¹⁶from 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*.

Wow. I love this passage. So do you see where is all of this leading? That the church, Christ's body on earth, grows up to resemble Him! This is the goal, this is what we are striving for - to be - together - like Jesus!

You measure the health of a church by how much it is like Jesus in truth and in love!

I mean we talk about this, but it's really true that we are to be Jesus' hands and feet, and heart, and mouth. It's not exaggerating to say that the church is a kind of *second incarnation* of Jesus Christ *in* this world and *to* this world! That's mindblowing.

- Remember what Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus when He knocked him off of his horse: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Jesus means it when He calls us His body!

So the *inward goal* of church - MBC - is to keep growing - in truth and love - to be more and more like Jesus. That's our job description as the church.

****How do people see God?***

Now I want you to follow me for a few minutes here. Indulge me in some Bible study: I saw something in God's Word just this last week that I had never seen before. I thought of a phrase that John uses twice, in his Gospel, and then in his first epistle: it's this phrase "*no one has ever seen God*." Turn with me to John 1—

- John 1:18 ¹⁸*No one has ever seen God*; (but) the only God, who is at the Father's side (He's talking about Jesus), He has made him known.

What's he saying? God is invisible - He is pure spirit, He can't be seen. But Jesus has made the Father known. John calls Jesus, *monogenes theos* = the only begotten God = beloved, underline that in your Bible. This is a direct statement that Jesus is God.

And Jesus made the Father *known*. That is the Gk. word *exegesis*; He has interpreted and explained the Father to us. Didn't Jesus say to Philip, "Philip, if you've seen Me, you have seen the Father!"

- Question: What is God like? Answer: Jesus. Look at Jesus.

"No one can see God," but we see Him revealed and explained in *Jesus*.

And John used this very same phrase in another passage, over in—

- 1 John 4:12 ¹²No one has ever seen God;

Now stop there - hold this thought (I know I ask you to hold a lot of thoughts - sorry!), but let's back up to see what John wants to say—

- 1 John 4:7 ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. . .

God is love, all love originates in God. But God is invisible, right? - no one can see Him - so how do we know the love of God? I.e., How is it exegeted and explained? Look—

- 1 John 4:9-10 ⁹In this the love of God was made manifest (displayed) among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Wow. So how do we know the love of God? God sent His Son into this world to die for us to take our punishment, that we might live through Him - that's God's love, fleshed out. Displayed. Want to know God's love? Look at the cross. And the application for us is—

- 1 John 4:11 ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

I.e. We must love our brothers and sisters in Christ *because* God has loved us, and we must love each other *the way* God has loved us, with self-sacrificing love. Now come back to that phrase—

- 1 John 4:12 ¹²*No one has ever seen God;* (but) if we love one another (the way Jesus loved us), God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (Manifested, displayed, seen through us!)

Love *originates* in God, was *manifested* in His Son, and now, it is displayed and made known to the world when they see His people, His church, loving one another! The world can't see the Father, they can't see the Son, but they can see His church and we are here to show them Jesus!

This is enough to chew on for lunch, isn't it? But do you see how very, very important the church is to God, to us, and to the unsaved world:

- If you get this, how can you *not* love the church, warts and all? You know, for folks who gripe and criticize the church, or even abandon church altogether, they need to realize, Jesus doesn't have a plan B. He said, "I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it!" He is doing what He is doing through His body, His Bride. Period at the of the sentence. The church is Jesus' plan A - you have to be part of His church to be part of His plan.

II. How do we get there?

If the goal is for all of us together to become more like Jesus, how do we get there? Two things are necessary: we speak the truth in love, and we're all involved—

- ¹⁵Rather, (rather than being tossed around by false teachers and phonies), *speaking the truth in love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ . . .

A. *Truthing in love.*

Look at—

- ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

“Rather,” means, “rather than being misled by false teachings—what comes next? *“Speaking the truth in love”* - that is how we grow up in every way in Christ!

In the Gk., it turns the noun, “truth” into a verb so that it literally says, “truthing in love!” And Paul links truth and love together for two reasons: first of all, we should never speak the truth in an unloving way - what a contradiction to Christ that is! God’s Word has maximum effect when it’s given in the context of a loving relationship. But second, we can’t love each other to Christlikeness *without* giving them the Word. Paul could have just as easily have said, “loving in truth!”

And this “truthing” is a *plural* verb - we are all to be speaking God’s Word to one another to grow up into Christ. All of us. The first Christians really got this. Listen to this passionate prayer from the believers in Jerusalem—

- Acts 4:29-31 ²⁹And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to *your servants* [that’s how they saw themselves] *to continue to speak your word with all boldness,* ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” ³¹And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

- Because God has called *all of us* to be “*a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*”

This should be normal Christian living, did you know that?

- Colossians 3:16 ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Paul said this about the believers in Rome—

- Romans 15:14 ¹⁴I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.
- Hebrews 3:12-13 ¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Speak up when a brother or sister is starting to drift! How can you say you love them if you don’t open your mouth and tell them the truth? And a few chapters later, in the most direct passage in the New Testament that tells all Christians to go to church, what should happen when they are there?

- Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Oh, be *intentional* to encourage your brothers and sisters to love and serve Christ. Consider - think about it ahead of time. You can't do that if you're not at church, but you also can't do it if you don't open your mouth. Let me encourage you to take some baby steps here:

* Make it a point to get out of your comfort zone to talk to someone you haven't talked to before - I know many of you don't even know the names of other people in this church because they sit on the other side of the sanctuary! You might actually feel like a missionary if you walk over there! Then, bring God's Word into that conversation: "So what did you learn from the sermon this morning? How could I pray for you this week?"

*Men - do this with your wife and with your kids: lunch after church should always be a time to reflect on the Word you have just heard. And you husbands, how much are you speaking God's Word to your wives? Leave her a Scripture taped to the bathroom mirror for her - or taped to her coffee mug. Text Scripture to her during the day. Oh, if you treat your bride the way Jesus treats His, you will—

- Ephesians 5:25-26 ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.

*Moms and dads, as you talk to your kids, bring Scripture into your daily lives, your discipline, explaining the world to your kids through the lens of Scripture.

*How can you speak the truth in love to someone this week?

A few years ago, we would take big bags of blankets that our precious ladies in the "Widow's Might" group made for the homeless folks in SR. That shows the love of Christ all by itself, but these ladies wanted to leave these folks with more than just warmth, so on every blanket was a tag with God's Word on it—

- Psalm 4:8 "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

B. Everyone involved.

Let me show you how this entire passage was misunderstood for many centuries: The KJV translates Ephesians 4:12 like this, God gave the gifted men in v.11, including the pastor-teacher to the church—

- ¹²For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

So if you read it like this, what is the pastor's job? Everything: To perfect the saints, to do the work of the ministry, and to edify the body of Christ.

- Many Reformed churches still believe this - I just read a blog this week by a well-known Reformed professor mocking the idea that all Christians should be doing what v. 12 says. I've actually preached at a church that believes this -and they literally had me do the entire service myself: I greeted, read scripture, prayed all the prayers, lead the singing, preached, and closed in prayer - it was very tiring!

But if this is the way you interpret this passage, that's what the minister does, while the congregation says, "Look at him go!" So the body of Christ only has two parts: a big mouth in the pulpit and a big ear in the pew.

But look at the way the ESV translates it, which I believe is correct, and it changes the whole meaning. You take out the comma, which isn't in the Greek: "God gave these gifted men, including the pastor-teacher to the church—

- ¹²to equip *the saints* for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

Do you see the difference? The Pastor-teacher's job is to equip the saints so that *they* can do the work of ministry to the end that the body of Christ is built up. There aren't any *watchers* in the body of Christ, only *workers*. The Pastor-teachers are the trainers who equip - how? What is it that makes the Christian adequate, equipped for every good work? The Word of God. So the #1 job of these men to outfit the troops with the Word so that they can do all the many, varied works of ministry, and to the end that the body of Christ is built up, edified, and sanctified, and like Jesus Christ in this world.

I'm not the body of Christ! I can't do it all. Jesus gave me some gifts that you need, and He gave you gifts I that need—

- 1 Peter 4:10-11 ¹⁰As *each* has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.
- Romans 12:6-8 ⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us *use* them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Do you see the variety of ways God gifts us to love one another to Christlikeness? Some teach, some serve: Paul calls this the gift of *helping* over in 1 Cor. - mowing lawns, chopping firewood, running errands for those who can't get out - doing all the stuff we need done here to prepare for worship and keep the church looking nice. You don't have to be a theologian to do these things, but think about how the body has served you in these ways and how it's kept you walking with Christ.

- Some of you have the gift of getting one-on-one: you have a cup of coffee and encourage and exhort; (we've got men doing that at the Cowpoke, twice a week) God has blessed some of you with money to give - and if you have been on the receiving end, what powerful witness of Christ that is! Some serve by leading, going to meetings, making decisions; some show mercy: they are the first ones to visit the sick in the hospital, to make meals and phone calls.

I'll tell you, it's not so important that you can label your gift but that you just serve as you have the opportunity, to the best of your ability, and then watch what God can do through you.

I want you to look again with me at—

- ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly,

But let me take this apart and put it back together. Go back to v.15: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ— then he picks up the sentence in the last phrase of v.16: “(who) makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” So Jesus, the Head of the body, makes His body grow so that it builds itself up in love - how? Only “*when each part is working properly.*” Jesus’ plan for His church - that’s us - is that as we *each* and *all* exercise our gifts to love one another to Christlikeness, He Himself works through us to grow up His body. His Word, and His love flows through each part, and the whole body gets the nourishment. And it grows. *You* grow.

This means two things that we all need to hear - are you ready?

1.) *You can’t grow apart from Christ’s body - the local church.*

Can’t you just love Jesus and read your Bible, or keep the family home, maybe do home church, and . . . no. The Head works through *His body* to grow *His body* - you must be here and involved to receive the love and spiritual nourishment Jesus wants to give you. You can’t grow alone. There is no such thing in the New Testament as a solitary Christian. We need each other, warts and all. You need me, and I need you, and that means every Sunday, unless you’re sick - or at winter camp!

I’ll let John Calvin say it a bit more, uh, bluntly—

- “They therefore are insane, who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit, and the proud, who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the Church.”

Please don’t write this off - listen to what God would say to you this morning through His Word. There is nothing more important to your family, your marriage, your kids, than to have them all here every Sunday, as much as is possible.

2.) *You need to be involved and serving - in the local church.*

- Ephesians 4:16 ¹⁶from 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.

What do we call it when one part of the body stops functioning? Handicapped! When that happens, the whole body suffers, and the foot tries to do what the hand is supposed to do, or the eye tries to make up for the ear - it’s not healthy, it doesn’t grow, and it doesn’t look like Christ!

*Maybe you’ve had a lifelong inferiority complex - you feel that you don’t measure up, you’re not as talented as other people. In whatever group you’re a part of, they could easily do without you. You are dispensable. *Well, not if you’re a Christian!* If Jesus saved you, you can know with 100% certainty that you have a place in His church! Jesus has given you gifts to use, and a place to use them. You say, “But I’m weak, I feel unnecessary!” Well God says to you—

- 1 Corinthians 12:22 ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are *indispensable*. (the Gk. means, “*needed.*”)

In Christ's body, you are *needed!* We need you. I need you. So that we all, together, can show the world Jesus.

Janice was part of a little church down in the SF Valley in 1969 when they got a new, very young pastor named John MacArthur. He immediately began teaching through Ephesians and explaining that Jesus is the Head of His church, and it grows when every part does its part. The people listened. Within 3 years, they were up to 900 people, and Moody Monthly magazine did an article on the church called, "*The Church with 900 Ministers*" because they got it that it's the job of the pastor was to equip the saints through the Word, and their job was to do the work of the ministry!

MacArthur said this in the article - he was just 32 years old: "The people do the work . . . As the people see needs in particular areas, they come to us with suggestions as to what should be done. And I say to them: "So go do it!" As a result, the article said, '800-900 people are actively engaged in some form of weekday activity that strengthens and enlarges the ministry of Grace Church.' Numbers of conversions took place through local witness, in such places as a McDonald's where members held a Bible study. Hunger for instruction led to a Logos Study Center at the church on Monday and Tuesday evenings, where other men were the speakers [I was one of the teachers there.] And 500 attended the Wednesday prayer meeting in the new church auditorium which had opened that same year."

And it's worked pretty well for over 50 years now: if you've been down to Grace Community Church, they run about 10,000 now, and their ministry is worldwide - and not just John MacArthur, but those they have trained and sent out, hundreds, maybe thousands of missionaries, church planters, and pastors, literally all over the world: one of them is talkin' to you right now!

* * *

So let me ask you this morning: *How do you feel about the church?* (repeat) I hope you've seen from Scripture, that however you answer that question, Jesus takes it personally, because He loves His church: "*From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy Bride, with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.*" Brothers and sisters, pray that Jesus gives you a passionate love for His church, and a commitment to serve her - so that the world will see Jesus.

- Benediction - Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:21 "to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.