

Spiritual Body Building

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[0 : 00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Do grab a Bible if you don't have one. Our red one is located at the front, the side, the back. Grab one and read along.

As I say, Phil's going to be preaching to us. And it's on the theme of maturing in Christ and being spiritual bodybuilders. And we're going to be reading in two places this evening.

First, Psalm 1. And then we're going to be reading Ephesians 4, 1 to 16. So do you have a finger in Ephesians 4 ready to turn over there?

But we'll start by reading Psalm 1 together. So Psalm 1, beginning at verse 1.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

[1 : 04] But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. And over to Ephesians chapter 4.

Paul writes, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of a 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, one spirit.

[2 : 18] 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. And saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions of 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.

[3 : 20] 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 through by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

By human cunning. By craftiness and 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. Amen. This is God's word. And we'll be returning to it shortly with Phil.

Well, please do have your Bibles open to Ephesians chapter 4.

[4 : 22] That we read a moment ago. Verses that are all about spiritual bodybuilding. Well, earlier this week, I took a train journey with my two young sons.

And they were all very excited. And when we came into Central Station, we came off the train. My youngest blurted out this really excited question. Daddy, where are we going?

To which my response was, to the shops, to buy your mother a birthday present of some kind. And that was not the exciting answer that he was expecting. But when we ask that question, where are we going?

On a much, much, much bigger scale. The Bible gives us an answer that is infinitely better than the one I gave my three-year-old son. Where are we going?

Where is the cosmos going? Where is everything in the seen reality and everything in the unseen spiritual realm going? Well, Ephesians 1 verse 10 has the answer.

[5 : 33] One day soon, absolutely everything and everyone is going to be under the visible and unopposed rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the great climax of God's eternal sovereign plan.

One day soon, history is not rumbling on in chaos. No, history is headed for its appointed end. And that one day when the Son of God appears, everything and everyone will be united under his visible and unopposed rule.

And right now, in preparation for that great end, God is at work. And what is his work? Well, he is creating a new humanity who will rule and reign with the Lord Jesus in his glory over everything and everyone for all eternity.

That is what God is doing right now, even as I speak from this platform. And as you sit and listen, that's what God is doing in the world. He is creating a new humanity made up of people from all nations and all backgrounds who have been brought into life-giving union with Jesus Christ by faith and by the Spirit.

They've been born again. And these people have done nothing to deserve such a privilege.

Nothing. They've not earned their way into this new humanity. God has done this by his undeserved kindness alone.

[6 : 59] And God has given this new humanity a name. That is, the church. If you're a Christian here this evening and you are part of God's new humanity, and God has done this for you by grace alone.

And that really, if you were to look at the letter to Ephesians chapter 1 to 3, is what Paul has been unpacking. The wealth of the church. That in Christ we are the most spiritually rich and privileged people ever.

And having unpacked the wealth of the church, Paul goes on then in chapters 4 to 6 to teach about the walk of the church. He says, chapter 4, verse 1, In other words, live out your new God-given identity.

Be who you are in the Lord Jesus. And in our verses this evening, we are going to look at together, Paul says that an integral part of us walking in a manner worthy of all that Jesus has done for us, is that we are to grow and mature.

And we're to do that all together as one body. And I would like us to look at verses 11 to 16 tonight under three headings.

[8 : 31] So firstly, let's notice the foundation we must have if we are to grow. The foundation we must have if we are to grow.

Proclamation of the word of God must be the foundation of all of our church life if we want to grow and mature. Without this foundation in place, we will not grow and mature.

And we can see that this is so from the gifts that Jesus has given to the church in verse 11. Let me just mention a bit of the context. In verses 8 to 10, Paul reminds the Ephesians that the Lord, having descended down from heaven and completed his work of redemption that he was sent to carry out, he ascended in triumph back to heaven over all of his foes.

And in verse 11, Paul mentions four gifts that the ascended Jesus has given to the church. Let's just run our eyes over verse 11 again. Verse 11, And he, the ascended Christ, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd teachers, or it could be translated pastor teachers.

And that, although it looks like two different offices, shepherd teachers, actually is referring to the one position, not two separate offices, two different roles. You shepherd the church of God by teaching the church the word of God.

[10 : 01] That's what real pastoral ministry is. So those are the four gifts that Jesus has given the church. The apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherd teachers.

What do they all have in common? Well, they are all men who proclaimed and still proclaim the word of God to the church.

Let me just briefly unpack these four roles in a little detail, little detail, so we have an idea of what's being said here. Firstly, the apostles are mentioned there. And that's referring to the 12 unique men who were eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection.

And if you know the book of Acts, they were sent out at the day of Pentecost to preach the momentous news that Jesus is the Messiah for all people. And all people should repent and turn to him.

And Paul himself, who wrote this letter, was appointed an apostle a bit later in the book of Acts. And he took the gospel to all of the Gentile nations. And as the gospel was preached and planted by these men in the first century, churches grew.

[11 : 11] And the apostles continued to nurture these churches by preaching and teaching. And some of the apostles, as you'll know, went on to write the books of the New Testament. Some of them, anyway.

But then Paul mentions as well, secondly, the prophets here. Now, he's probably referring here to the Old Testament prophets, those who wrote the Old Testament itself. But I take it he is also referring to the other men who would go on to write the other books of the New Testament who are not apostles, such as Luke.

Luke was not an apostle, but he did write scripture. So the apostles and the prophets were given as gifts for us, for the church.

And they wrote the scriptures in the power of the Spirit so that the church would have the written word of God. All that we need for life in these last days. And we know from elsewhere in the Bible, friends, that we should not expect anyone today to hold these unique roles in the church.

But the next two roles mentioned, the evangelists, the shepherd teachers, are roles which have carried on throughout church history. And we have them today. Evangelists, when you look at all of the references to them in the New Testament, seems to be referring to those who are especially gifted at speaking God's word to those outside of the church, those who are not yet believers.

[12 : 39] Although elsewhere in the New Testament, we are told that evangelists did sometimes and do today teach the word of God to the church family that they belong to. And the shepherd teacher or the pastor teacher there, the fourth gift mentioned, that is referring to those who preach the word of God and teach it to the people of God week in and week out.

Now there's so much more we could say about that, about these four roles, but hopefully that gives you an idea of what Paul's talking about here. And these teachers, these proclaimers of God's word, they are gifts to the church.

And the fact that Paul mentions these as being Christ's gift to the church, it highlights them and says that this is actually our greatest need as a church. It's to hear the word of God being proclaimed to us all the time.

All the time. And Paul goes on to expand that in the rest of verse 11. Look at verse 11 again, please. Paul says, And he, the ascended Christ, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd teachers, to do what?

To equip the saints for ministry, for building up the body of Christ. So Jesus has graciously given and continues to give Bible proclaimers to the church.

[14 : 02] So that the members of the church will be equipped for ministry. We'll think about that in more depth in just a minute. But for now, just notice that word proclamation must be at the foundation of all that we do as a local church.

Because friends, without it, none of us would be equipped to do what we are called to do. But here's the thing. What does Paul mean by being equipped?

What does it mean that we are to be equipped? Well, the Greek word translated here as equipped could be literally translated as to fit something together that has been broken or to bring something into its proper use.

The words, if you look at ancient Greek texts outside of the New Testament, was used to describe the kind of resetting or the fixing of a broken bone. It was a medical term.

Or maybe putting in a dislocated shoulder back in place. The word could also be translated as mending, as in mending a net that was broken and needed to be repaired.

[15 : 04] And friends, this is why Bible teachers and proclaimers are so crucial for the church. Bible teachers are to speak the powerful word of God and the spirit of God to the people of God so that they will be transformed and fixed and mended constantly, made healthy, repaired, restored.

In other words, equipped to carry out the ministry they've been called to carry out. See, friends, all of the damage that sin has done to us, we're probably not even aware of it. I'm probably not aware of the damage sin has done in my life and in my thinking. And so it is with you. And that is why we need to come and sit under faithful Bible teaching to be repaired. For the word of God is the remedy against all the damage that sin has done in our lives. That is our greatest need. Not just at the beginning of the Christian life, but all the way through it. All the way through it. If a church does not have Bible proclamation as its foundation, then the church will be a spiritually sick place. Its members will not be fit for ministry. [16:16] And instead of being a healthy and growing church, it will be immature, full of ailments. If it's like a body, it will be riddled with injuries and failing organs.

Now let me just say something to you. Maybe you're here this evening and you may be new to the Tron. Maybe you're just coming to check us out as a church to see what we're all about. If that's you, you're very welcome here.

And we hope that you feel at home with us. But I hope you can see that actually as a church, this is what we're all about. We are all about proclaiming the word of God. And this is why.

This is why. Because without it as our foundation, we will not grow and we will fail to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. In fact, actually, if we disregarded the word of God and didn't have this at our foundation, there would be a point where we would cease to be a church.

We might still gather. We might still sing hymns and whatnot. But we would cease to be a church.

This is also, by the way, where we make much of identifying and training up gifted and godly men in how to handle, preach, and teach the word of God.

[17:27] Bringing them on as apprentices and sending them through Cornhill. And if appropriate, if right, bringing them on to the pastor's training course. Because friends, we always need to be identifying those men whom Christ himself is raising up to be pastor, teachers, and evangelists today.

So that they will carry on this foundational work that we need. Well, that's our first point this evening. The foundation that we must have in place if we are to grow.

And here's our second point. The fellowship that we need if we are to grow. The fellowship that we need to grow. Growing in maturity in the Christian life, it is not a solo activity, but a corporate activity, a team activity.

If we want to grow, then we need to be part of a fellowship of the church family all around us. And it's actually the great surprise in this passage.

I wonder if you spotted the great surprise in the passage as it was being read out earlier. The surprise of the passage is that none of the men mentioned in verse 11 are actually specifically said to be carrying out ministry.

[18:41] Did you notice that? Verse 11, the apostles, the prophets, the pastor, teachers, the evangelists, they are not described as the ones who are carrying out ministry. I take it they do carry out ministry, yes.

But Paul doesn't say they are the ones carrying out ministry because that's not where his emphasis lies in this passage. Who is said to carry out ministry here? Verse 12, the saints.

In other words, every Christian, every Christian who confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord is a saint. And so every Christian has been called to carry out ministry.

ministry. And our ministry is that we are together to build up the body of the church. Ministry is not just simply carried out by the bloke up the front who gives the sermons.

The responsibility for producing a healthy church and producing growth that lies with you. Every member of the church.

[19:45] Friends, can I just ask you, I'm going to ask you, I was debating about whether to do this, but can I just ask you just now, just gently, without any cringe, just have a look around at the people next to you. Just look around the row. You may be outside the church.

You have a look over there. You have a look over there. Have a look around about you. You're looking at ministers. You're looking at those in ministry. And your great ministry is to help one another grow.

These people that you've looked at, there might be some faces of people there that you don't know. There might even be some faces of people there who, in the past, you find difficult. I might be one of them.

We are still sinners. Yes. Say yes, yes. We are difficult. But nevertheless, if we're in this church, we are called to build up one another and minister to one another.

That's part of living a life that is shaped and mastered by the grace God has poured out upon you through Jesus. We are responsible for helping one another to grow.

[20 : 50] The Bible actually knows nothing of lone ranger Christians who try and grow in isolation. One commentator put it like this, we cannot be truly united with Christ without being united truly and therefore visibly with Christ's people.

Yes. We are members of one another and real Christian discipleship takes that seriously and seeks to live out that truth visibly in a meaningful commitment to the living body of a real church family. Indeed, so interdependent are we as Christians that our own personal health, preservation and growth in Christ is completely bound up with the health, preservation and growth of the whole body, the church to which we belong.

It is, as the whole body is built up, that each part is also built up. And friends, you sometimes encounter of professing Christians who think that that is just nonsense.

I remember a few years ago now, I was at a dinner party in a very, very nice house in England and I sat down next to a bloke and we got talking away about things and the subject of church came up and he said that he didn't have much time for his church family at all.

[22 : 18] Oh, he grows, he said, he assured me. And how he grows and matures is by spending time alone at home in his study reading the Bible, reading thick theological tomes and listening to sermons given by his favorite preachers.

According to Paul, that sort of attitude is really, really unhealthy. that sort of attitude, cheating to grow in isolation away from a church family is actually impossible.

It's a mark of deep immaturity and it's also a mark of being elitist, thinking that you are better than the church family and that attitude should be repented of immediately.

My friends, don't get me wrong, don't get me wrong, reading your Bible, reading good theology, sound theology at home, it can be brilliant. And in fact, I think most of us could deal with a bit more of that, couldn't we?

I know I could. Maybe that's true of your life too. I also think that listening to a sermon or a Bible talk online now and again during the week is a helpful thing unless it is puffing you up with pride.

[23 : 33] If you do that and it's making you arrogant and it's making you think that you are somehow higher than everyone else in the church, that is very dangerous. That is actually to split yourself apart from the body of Christ.

We must not do things that take us away from growing and maturing with our church family. This is where we should be and this is where growth happens as we grow together.

But please, don't mishear me again. Do read your Bible at home. Do read good books. That's why we've got a good bookshop there at the back with things to help you. But remember, this is where we grow and this is how we grow, says Paul.

If we surround ourselves with the fellowship of the church family, we will grow. Growing in the Christian life is a corporate activity, not a solo one. But how exactly are church members to build up the body of the church?

Well, verse 15 is key. What did he say there? Paul says, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head and to Christ.

[24 : 46] Now, what does Paul mean about speaking the truth in love here? Is he calling on the church to be truthful in our speech? Well, that may be a good thing, but it doesn't seem to be what Paul is meaning here.

Looking at the immediate context, just at the end of verse 14, Paul has mentioned false teachers, those who are fueled by human cunning, those who do not speak the truth of God's word, like the men mentioned back in verse 11.

These false teachers speak twisted things, things designed to do spiritual harm to the church. Their speech is designed to lead people away from Christ. And so in verse 15, speaking the truth in love must mean to speak things that have the opposite effect of the false teachers.

In other words, Paul says, speaking the truth in love means to speak the truth of God's word into our lives, one another's lives. And reading verse 15 in light of verse 11, Paul seems to be saying that we build up the body of church by gathering together regularly like this to sit under Bible preaching and teaching.

And then having done that, we, the members of the church, are to help one another to apply and obey what we've heard proclaimed. That is how we spiritually body build.

[26 : 06] We all sit under the preaching of the word every week, we listen, and then throughout the rest of the week we seek to help one another to walk by the obedience of faith according to what we've heard in our everyday lives.

You see, it's crucial that a church has a good and faithful preacher in the pulpit. That is absolutely key. But that alone is not enough to grow and mature a church, says Paul.

You can have a good and faithful preacher in the pulpit giving good and faithful sermons week in and week out, but if the members of the church don't step up and carry out their ministry of speaking the truth and love to one another, that church won't grow.

Just think about it, that's actually really alarming, is it not? A church that will fail to grow will be a church full of members who sit on Sundays and listen to sermons and they think things like this, oh wow, listen to this sermon, it's just great, I love this pastor, he's really good, what an explosive preacher.

That's got the wrong focus. The focus is on the man there, the focus should be on the word. The mature way of listening to a sermon according to Paul is to sit there thinking, Heavenly Father, please help me to hear this and obey this by the power of your spirit, help me to apply this deeply to my own heart and mind, please use this to change me and please help me to help others do the same in the church family.

[27 : 42] Amen. That is the mature way to listen to sermons. Peter Adam, some of you will know, a retired minister from Australia says that as church members we should listen to sermons with two ears.

One ear should be listening to the sermon for yourself. Keen to hear how this part of God's word being preached impacts your own life and heart.

Yet at the same time we're also to listen to the sermon with another ear open of how the passage applies to the whole church and also to loved ones and friends within the church.

we're to sit there and think well that truth that's preached there how does that apply to me? Lord help me to obey this but also we're to listen out and think well how does this apply to my friends? how can I carefully and lovingly help that brother or sister that I know in the church apply this truth to their life as well?

[28 : 44] That is exactly what Paul's talking about here. That is the key to spiritual bodybuilding. We speak the truth and love to one another. And I think friends that shows that we all have the responsibility to get to know others in the church to invest time and energy in building up relationships and friendships with others so that we start to look out for them and so that we can start to speak the truth and love to them and so they can do the same back to us.

Let me say again that is not an easy thing. That's not an easy thing. For friendship is not something that just pops out of the air. cultivating friendship requires time and energy and effort.

But if we invest in friendships in the church friends it will be so worth it because it will make us all grow together. Now one great way to know people, get to know people and to be in an environment where you can speak the truth and love to each other is to join a growth group, to think about coming into a growth group.

It's one of the many reasons why I'm thankful for my growth group. But look, whether you're in a growth group or not, every single one of us has been called to this great ministry. What a privilege this is.

What a privilege. If we're serious about walking in a manner worthy of our calling, then that is what we'll dedicate a lot of our time to doing with the rest of the church family.

[30 : 15] Building them up. And that is how we'll grow up into Christ, as verse 16 says, who is our head, the head of the body. This is how we become more like him.

Now let me just say that there will be some members of the church who, because of personal circumstances, they can't meet regularly with the rest of the church family. Perhaps due to ill health, they're not able to get out on Sundays anymore.

They have legitimate reasons for not gathering with the rest of the church family, maybe as frequently as they did in the past. And for those individuals, we know who they are, and we're working hard to get alongside them.

And it's important that if you know someone like that who can't make it out, that you go to them, you call them, you pray for them, you show them love, remind them that they are still part of the fellowship.

But if we're in good health, friends, and if there's no constraints upon us, then really none of us should be shrinking away from meeting together in person.

[31 : 20] We should all be gathering together so that we can crack on with building up the church. Every second that goes by is a second closer to that great glorious day when Jesus appears.

Every second that goes by is a day closer to home for us. So let's live our lives in light of that marvelous truth. Well, thirdly, and briefly, let's notice the fruit that we will produce as we grow. Paul tells us about the glorious fruit that we will produce as a church, as we have Bible proclamation as our foundation, and as our membership is speaking the truth in love to one another.

Please look at verse 12. Christ gave Bible proclaimers 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 the knowledge of the Son of God, of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

faith. Now, when Paul says we will attain the unity of the faith, he's not talking there about the faith of an individual or the faith that someone holds personally and exercises.

[32 : 39] Rather, he's talking about being united in the faith, the faith that was delivered once for all to the saints. In other words, we will all be united together theologically in the Bible's theology.

theology. The truth of the word will have shaped and mastered our minds so that we will all be united in the Bible's truth. And we will stand together in that truth, even if it's costly.

And just notice also Paul says that another fruit there is that we will attain, if we grow, the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, we will know our Savior better and better.

We won't just know stuff about Jesus, although that's important, but we will actually know him better. That is, we will have a deeper relationship with our Lord who is our head.

And we will love him more. And of course, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to know him means at the same time unavoidably to become more like him.

[33 : 41] We will share in his mature life. We will walk in a Christ-like manner and be conformed to his likeness. And friends, I don't know about you, but I just find this is so attractive.

This is so, don't you want this? Don't we want this? I want this to be true of my life, but also to be true of us all as a church, a whole church family together.

And just look at verse 14. Paul says that if we were to grow up together, then we will also be a church full of discernment. Verse 14. We will no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, craftiness, and deceitful schemes. In other words, our church will be full of discerning Christians who are able to biblically assess what they hear and see. And that is such good news because there are plenty of voices out there in the world speaking all sorts of deceitful things that are meant to pull us away from Jesus.

And as I said earlier, there are also voices within the professing church doing exactly the same. In fact, I could take you on YouTube right now and show you endless videos of content that claims to be Christian, but is actually deeply wrong, deeply harmful for the church.

[35 : 03] Be very careful, friends, online. But a mature church will be full of people who have had their thinking so shaped by the word of God, they can identify a theological rat right away.

And a mature church will be full of members who lovingly look out for one another in this regard. Years ago now, when I was a student, I got my hands on a book that claimed to be a Christian book.

It was very trendy, very trendy. Loads of Christians my age at that time from across Glasgow were raving about it. throughout the student world at that time, people loved this book.

And you know, I read it and I thought to myself, oh, that's got some really different ideas, but it seems pretty good. I like this book. And thankfully at the time, I was a member of the student growth group and released a word.

And I was able to ask the members of my group what they thought of this book. And they were much more discerning and mature and wise than I was. And right away, they could tell me why the book was not helpful, why the book was actually one that should be thrown in the bin because I had some major, major errors in it.

[36 : 19] It was a very sneaky book. My brothers and sisters protected me. Now, if we are to carry on growing and maturing together as a church, then that sort of incident will happen more and more.

We will protect each other. We will not be taken in by dodgy teaching. We will be able to know the truth and stand firm in it. And friends, again, isn't that so attractive?

Don't you want that? Don't you want to be part of a church like that? Well, if so, my brothers and sisters, let's keep on listening to Bible teaching and preaching.

Let's keep doing all that we can to minister to each other, to speak the truth and love together, so that we will be transformed and built up more and more into a church like this.

And so that more and more we will be made into the people that we will be on the last day. People who are more and more like Jesus, our Lord. Well, let's bow our heads down and I'll pray for us.

[37 : 26] Let's pray. Lord, please help us, our dear Heavenly Father, to walk in a manner worthy of our glorious calling.

We marvel at the grace that you've shown us and we pray that we will take our responsibility seriously to grow and mature together as a body united in Christ.

Help us to help each other to love and to obey your holy word so that together we will be transformed more and more into the people that you will have us be.

We pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.