

Gospel Growth

a sermon in the series
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

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Ephesians 4:11-16

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

As Eve was created from the side of Adam, so the church is the creation of God brought forth from our Last Adam's bleeding side. It is not a place or event but a single community with many members and is the body of our Lord on this earth, the visible representation of Jesus to the world. When I look upon you, I'm looking at a microcosm of Jesus, a miniature view of the whole. I'm looking at Jesus this morning. That's not blasphemous, it's Scriptural.

You and I are a group of believers who have received the transforming, life-giving power of the Spirit of God who so changes us that the Bible calls the change one from death to life. It is not *like* a resurrection it is a resurrection. Who you were you are no longer; you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. This one universal church of our Lord Jesus Christ is manifested throughout the world in what we call local churches. In this location this morning, we are a miniature assembly of what God has assembled from the saints who have gone before and all the saints throughout the world—His universal church. It's a remarkable thing. A local church is to be in miniature what the body of Christ is in total.

What does this mean to you? Only you can answer that. For believers, however, it means everything. The church is much more important than what the 21st century church culture has made it. If you understand what a local church is and how it is to function, it ought to be everything to you. Isn't Jesus everything to you? How do you separate Jesus from His body? We've already established the fact that headless bodies are no good. For example, only death can separate my wife from me; until then we are one flesh. She is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. What God

has put together, let no man put asunder. Christ and His church are irrevocably joined. Satan nor anything else can separate her from Him. He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit. What does this mean to you? It should mean everything. But if you see the church as an event, something you do on Sunday or Wednesday, then it will not mean much to you. If you define the church as a place, somewhere you go on Sunday and Wednesday, you will not experience the church's impact on your life and your life will have no positive impact on the church.

It's not hard for me to see why people don't like to attend church services because they rarely see the church in action at a public worship service. It is just an event or place to go on Sunday and Wednesday evening. The church wasn't designed to operate only when assembled. And yet, because we define the church as an event or place we go, we only see the church functioning when it comes together. I ask you, why would somebody want to come to an event or a place when so little of the body of Christ is functioning? It's not difficult for me to see why unbelievers surely don't want to come together with saints. Why would an unchurched person want to attend a worship service or go to a building, wrongly named the church, when he sees that his church-attending neighbors are no different from him, except for the fact they go to a building and attend an event on Sunday?

The church has to be redefined and for that to happen we have to break the barriers of hell. I really mean this. Hell has convinced most of the church world that church is wherever they attend, an event that we do together in a "worship service." That's not the Bible's definition. What then is the church? Let's think in local church terms. What is OGBC? Every church, like the universal church, is to be a Gospel product, the result of the Word made flesh, and it is the Gospel that keeps the body together and healthy. Therefore, to understand what the church is, let's look at its origin. God has given us the Gospel and the Gospel has given life to the church.

I. The Gospel Gave Life to the Church

A. The Church of Jesus Christ is the Result of the Gift of God—the Gospel.

The life of the church springs from the Gospel. Jesus is the gift of God, from which we are born. The new birth, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus, is when a sinner has the life of God infused into him or her. But if that's true of a member of the body of Christ, the church, then it must be true of the church as well. God brings a body together and He gives it life and that life springs from the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? Again, we're still learning the Gospel, are we not? As this message comes to a conclusion you'll understand that statement. You'll understand we're still figuring out the Gospel. We will always be learning and trying to see deeper into its mysteries, because one will never fathom the totality of this glorious Good News.

In a nutshell, the Gospel is this. God created all that was made, including man to rule over what He produced. But man rejected and rebelled against his Creator. He decided to be the god of

his own life and rejected the majesty and rule of God. But God, in His great mercy wherewith He loved us, sent His the eternal Son of God, the express image of who He is, the perfection of God, to die in our place and suffer the deserved wrath of God against us. He took upon Himself our penalty. He bore our suffering and shame. He took upon and in Himself everything that was deserving of God's holy righteous judgment and suffered it on our behalf and was crucified. He died as a transgressor and was buried. And He was three days dead. On the third day, God raised Him from the dead. Why? Because He was a substitute. He had not sinned. He was spotless. He was perfection personified. Therefore He could carry my sins to the cross and die in my place. But God vindicated Him on the third day saying, "This is My Beloved, this is the Righteous One." God the Father raised Him from the dead so that the power of that resurrected life can live in us. And He's given that life to all who trust Him with their lives, sins, and futures. He has given us the Spirit of Jesus Christ to live in us. That is the Gospel, and from that, the church is born and has life.

B. The Church is Also the Result of Gifts Given to it by Christ Jesus.

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Ephesians 4:7)

To every one of you who are truly Christians, God has given gifts of grace. Those gifts of grace determine your place in the body. What makes a knee a knee? It's a knee because it bends and can bear the weight of the body. What makes an eye an eye? It sees and gives sight information to the brain so the brain can perceive what's out there. It's the function that determines what it is. Likewise, it is your gifts that determine your function within the body of Christ and therefore there is a local church.

II. Gospel Gifts Given to the Church For Its Growth

This church cannot grow except when it goes deeper into the Gospel. The logic of this statement is in the Apostle Paul's statement here in our text, if the life of the church comes from the Gospel, then it only makes sense that the life of the church is sustained from that which it came. The only way this church can thrive and flourish as God's will intends is for it to go deeper in the Gospel in understanding and in life.

A. These Gifts Are Gospel Gifts.

They are a product of the Gospel. They come to us because of what Christ has done and who He is. They are expressions of the Gospel.

B. Gospel Gifts Given to a Few to Strengthen the Gospel Gifts of the Many.

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Christ has given a minority the gifts to equip the majority for ministry. Everybody has Gospel gifts, but some have special gifts that equip and serve the Gospel gifts of the many.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

God has given five different kinds of ministry appropriate gifts in order to equip and serve the majority of the body to make sure the majority of the body works according to their giftedness. Those people are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

I don't want to get sidetracked this morning with the question asking if there are apostles and prophets today. I do not believe there are men who are inspired to write Scripture and reveal truth as the apostles and prophets did in the first century, but there are certainly men who have apostolic-like ministries and God uses them in many ways like He did some of the apostles and prophets. But whether there are or not is not really the question. The question is why would you need new apostles and prophets when the old ones are still functioning? The ministries of Paul and Peter and John and Jude did not die with them.

Paul makes it very clear in the second chapter of Ephesians that the church—universal and local—is built upon Christ the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets the foundation. That means when you go to the book of Corinthians the Apostle Paul's ministry is still functioning and authoritative and you better do what he said.

When you read Jude and he gives instruction to contend for the faith once delivered for the saints, you have to do that because his ministry as an apostle is still functioning through the written revelation of the Word. I don't need a new apostle today. I'll stick with the ones God gave the church.

What about evangelists, pastors, and teachers? Yes, there's a place for them. These offices, a poor term since the Bible doesn't really use that term; have been given to help the body learn how to exercise their Gospel gifts. That's what it says here, “for the equipping of the saints in ministry.” If the church is not ministering like it ought to, it's not necessarily the pastor's fault. It could be, but it's not necessarily the elders' fault. Each part has to do its fair share in order for the Bible to work, and how will it do that? It will do it as it thrives in the Gospel. This is what Paul says in the following verses.

III. The Gospel Grows the Church Into Maturity.

It's not that you learn the Gospel and then graduate beyond it and learn deeper truths like prophecy. You never graduate beyond the Gospel. Recently, I heard a man say, “We're really into prophecy at our church.” And I'm thinking, *You miss the Gospel when you do that.* Prophecy is part of the Gospel but it's not the sum total of it. The enemy doesn't care how much of the truth you believe as long as you don't believe all of it. He'll encourage you to believe in prophecy and the second coming and the tribulation and the mark of the beast. He'll encourage you to study all of that, supporting your fascination with the study of future events, so long as you don't understand it in relation to the Gospel. He wants to distract us from the heart of the truth of the Gospel.

A. The Goal is Maturity.

These Gospel gifts have been given for your equipping, so you know how to use them so that the church can be built up.

“till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” (Ephesians 4:13-14)

The goal of the Gospel gifts is that you and I grow up into maturity and this church be strong. Why does the church need to grow? The answer is in verse 15.

B. The Body is Dwarfed in Comparison to the Head.

The church needs to grow because we’ve got a normal functioning Head but this small, dwarfed body attached to it. We’ve got to do some growing to catch up to the size and proportion of the Head.

“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15)

The reason the church must grow is because we all begin as babies. All we know of the glorious Gospel is that Jesus died for me and has forgiven me of my sins and now He’s my Lord. That’s baby food. That’s all you need to know to get saved, but it’s not all you need to know about the Gospel. So here we are with Jesus as our Head and this shriveled, dwarfed body, which looks rather odd in comparison to the Head. The body needs to grow in proportion to the Head. How does it do that? Verse 15. *Speaking the truth in love.* What does the Apostle Paul mean by this phrase?

C. Speaking Truth is the Church’s Spiritual Growth Hormone.

“but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

The normal explanation is that Paul means correction. It’s typically explained that when a brother or sister is in error—maybe they’ve offended you, maybe they sinned in some way and have not repented from their sin or corrected their course—you’re to go to them and in love tell them the truth. By the traditional understanding, Paul is saying don’t rebuke without love. In this way, the erring body part has correction and recovery and can now grow again. But this text is not just about correction. Certainly it’s there, but it’s not the main idea Paul has in mind. Paul isn’t

talking about going to your brother or sister and correcting them in love saying something like this: “Now brother, I want you to know I love you, **but**...” and walking away congratulating yourself that, “I spoke the truth in love!” That’s not what Paul is meaning here. Certainly the Bible commands us to exhort one another and correct one another, but in this verse Paul does not mean rebuke in love. Rather, Paul means to speak the Gospel of Jesus Christ to one another. That’s what the context tells me.

The keyword here is *truth*. “Speak the *truth*...” What does he mean by this word *truth*? When you’re alone with God and reading the Scriptures and come to a word you know is a crucial, critical word, upon which the whole text pivots, you’ve got to correctly interpret it. When that happens, the first thing you need to do is find out if the author in the immediate context uses that word again. If he did, maybe it will give you a clue as to how he was thinking when he uses it. Paul uses the word *truth* again a few verses later.

“But you have not so learned Christ,²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:” (Ephesians 4:20, 21)

The “truth is in Jesus” is the key phrase. What is the truth that is in Jesus? It’s the Gospel! Why is the truth in Jesus the Gospel? Because Jesus is the Gospel! That’s part of our problem. We think the Gospel is this story about Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead. We think the Gospel is information and if we could just tell people enough information about Jesus and what He did then we will have been a good evangelist or witness. No, we haven’t. The Gospel is not only about what Jesus did it’s about who He is, because who He is makes what He has done effective. The Gospel is Christ. He is the Good News.

When Paul says, “You’ve learned that truth that is in Jesus,” He is saying that you’ve learned the Gospel, and all you’ve got to do is read from 17-21 and you’ll get the point. He says, listen, when you were Gentiles, you walked just like Gentiles walk now—in sin and blindness. But you have not so learned Christ. If you’ve been taught by Him, you know the truth is in Jesus. He’s talking about the truth they had heard. So when you go back to verse 15 and with that understanding read that verse, “speaking the truth (the Gospel) in love,” you understand that by the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, does the church mature.

A church matures when it operates with this Gospel-orientation. Without it, the church will never grow up into the Head, but will remain small and shriveled.

IV. A Church is Mature When It Operates With a Gospel-Orientation

A. Six Reasons A Gospel-Orientation Matures a Church.

The text alone should be sufficient, but there are other evidences.

I. Only the Gospel is the antidote to false teaching.

In verse 14 the Apostle Paul states that it is false teaching that stunts spiritual growth.

“that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” (Ephesians 4:14)

Only the Gospel grows you up from spiritual baby to spiritual manliness. Otherwise, one will remain like a child, gullible and naïve, and believe anything someone of authority tells them. But the deeper you go into the Gospel the more you can spot out and expose false teaching. This is crucial because the summary of the Christian doctrine is the Gospel. All roads lead to Calvary. Every doctrinal teaching of the New Testament is a doctrinal teaching about the Gospel. There is nothing outside of the Gospel when it comes to knowledge of God and His redemptive enterprise or how the church is to operate. There is nothing outside of the Gospel! So if you know the Gospel as you ought to know the Gospel, enough that you can speak the Gospel to one another, when false teaching comes up you will be able to recognize, “Hey, that does not have its root, origin, or foundation in the Gospel, therefore it’s counter-Gospel and I need to reject this.”

That’s why stadiums can be full of people listening to men who are supposedly evangelical preachers of the Gospel, but they are deceived because they don’t know the Gospel. I’m not taking pride that we know the Gospel, I’m pleading with you to know the Gospel or it won’t be very long and you’ll be following some pied piper. That’s what happens when you think you need to graduate beyond the Gospel. I’m simply saying you need to get secondary education and post-graduate education in the Gospel. You need to get your bachelor’s degree, your master’s degree, and your PhD in the Gospel. By the way, you can study the Gospel for the rest of your life and you’ll never plummet its depths. Why? Because in the Gospel is the storehouse of the wisdom of God. You can’t get beyond the Gospel.

So it’s Gospel truth that protects us against false doctrine.

2. Christ-centeredness or Gospel-orientation prevents idolatry.

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (Ephesians 4:17-19)

Does anyone recognize this text as a description of you? At one time you couldn’t even feel anything related to the goodness and glory of God. That’s how you were and that’s how they were. Paul is delivering the Gospel to them again to protect them from going back into idolatry.

Please listen, this is very important and relevant to everyone listening whether saved or not. There is something in all of us that makes us prone to seek out idols. This is in every one of us, including me. The New Testament is full of warnings to watch out for idolatry. Why say that to

Christians if they have been saved? If the transforming power of God and His grace has changed their lives, why would He say to them, “Watch out for idolatry. Don’t go back to this lifestyle of idols.” Because there is still something in us that wants to control. There is still something in us that wants to control.

Please listen. Some of you are not saved because you can’t see this. I’m not blaming you for not seeing it, but if you’ll listen and pray, “God help me to see it,” He’ll show you. He won’t turn that prayer away. You ask God right now to help you to see what this man is saying.

There is something in all of us which resists trusting God completely. There is something in me that doesn’t want to live completely by faith in God, because to live completely by faith in God means I have no say, no power, and no control. And yet, that’s what the Gospel commands. The Gospel commands complete faith and trust in God. Jesus said, you want to follow Me? The first thing you have to do is deny yourself, which means deny yourself the right to trust in you. If you can’t trust in you, you can’t control. And because we know we cannot control Jesus, something happens. We don’t even know it at the moment, but we begin to put more value on something than we ought to and it becomes an idol because we think we can control it.

What’s an idol? Anything you look to for something you ought to be looking to Jesus to do.

An idol is anything you build your life upon, anything so monumental that it’s the foundation of that which your world revolves around. That is worship and when you’re not revolving around Jesus it’s an idol. We build idols because we still want to exercise control. We can’t control Jesus, we know we might not have any idea what He is doing and often He leads us and we feel as blind as a bat. *I don’t know where You’re leading me, I don’t know what’s going to happen*, we pray. But He simply says, “Trust Me.” We don’t like that. So we’ll turn to idols, to things, people, or concepts, because we think we can exercise control in that area of our lives. But what we don’t know is that eventually the idol controls you. Always. It takes over. Even good things can be idols.

There are some people who make an idol out of their family. Their family becomes more important than anything else. That’s what they get their joy from, that’s what they get their significance from, and they don’t get it from Christ—that is an idol. But what happens is those idols begin to control you and then manipulate you. The only thing that will stop that from happening is the Gospel.

It’s the Gospel that tells us that God has broken the power of every idol so you never have to be under its domain. He has broken the power of sin and you can live free. The Gospel is the only antidote to idolatry.

3. Only the Gospel counter acts legalism and the flesh.

Once again, there is something in all of us that wants to *do*, because we want to be in control. Paul wrote to a group of churches in an area called Galatia, you know them as the Galatians,

who had heard the Gospel from Paul and had, within a short matter of time, turned from the Gospel and believed false teachers who told them they had to believe in Jesus but also do some other things.

There is something in all of us that wants to believe we're saved by grace but then after there is something for us to do. We struggle to believe the Gospel at its very core, which is why we struggle to believe God loves us. When your performance doesn't measure up to the perfection of Jesus, what do you have? How many of you are good like Jesus? How many of you can act like Jesus all the time? How many of you can do what you know you ought to do all the time?

What happens when I leave the Gospel and go to the works of the flesh and the law? Unworthiness sets in. *I don't feel worthy.* Beloved, as I've said before, when the enemy comes and says, "You can't believe God for that. You're asking God to be good to you when you've not been good to Him. You're not good enough to get that from God. You can't ask God for that. You can't believe God for that," you do not respond to your sense of unworthiness by trying to be worthy.

What is the natural reaction when you're an A/B student in school but get a C- on an exam? You know you can do better, right? So on the next exam you study a little harder and get your A or B+. This is how we think about the Christian life. *I know I'm saved, I know I'm a child of God, but I've got to show God how worthy I am.* But really you're trying to show yourself. It has nothing to do with God; it's all about you convincing yourself that you're worthy enough to believe God for good things. When, in fact, what you ought to do is not try to be worthy, like changing your performance so you get a better grade. What you need to do is embrace your unworthiness.

You say to the enemy, "Satan, that's right, I am unworthy. Let me tell you just how unworthy I am, and then let me tell you what the Bible says. Christ died for the ungodly! He didn't die for the worthy, He didn't die for the deserving, He didn't die for the fit; He died for the despicable, lowly wretches. And I am one of them." You'll never be anything this side of heaven in and of yourself other than an undeserving creature. But because of a Gospel of grace that says God loves the unworthy and gives love graciously to the undeserving, making them acceptable in Christ because they believe in Him, you can believe God for anything He leads you to believe Him for. It has nothing to do with your unworthiness. The Gospel alone is the only thing that will counteract that.

"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:1-3)

Oak Grove, I want to ask you something. Did you receive the Spirit of God by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? How did you get saved? Did you do something; did you perform some religious feat? No, you simply believed. That's not an action, it's an attitude of the heart that trusts and becomes an action displaying itself in obedience. It first begins as an act of the heart

and it manifests itself as a corresponding action. What Paul is saying is that you've left grace for the law. Go back to the Gospel because the Gospel is the way you got saved, it's the way you'll stay saved, and it's the way you'll grow in your salvation. It's the only way.

4. The Gospel is for believers as well as unbelievers.

Paul in our text shows the Gospel is our only message. You are to speak the Gospel to one another. Why? Because believers need the Gospel as much as unbelievers. See, I've got this tendency to go back into law, back into idolatry, and I need the Gospel because I'm not altogether conformed to His image yet.

To the Galatians, Paul shows there is only one message for believers.

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."
(Galatians 1:6-9)

There is no other message, church. This is the only message you're going to grow by and it's a message for believers as well as unbelievers.

5. A false dichotomy exists between evangelism and discipleship.

We have separated the two as distinct things. They are not distinct. Evangelism is a part of discipleship; it is the first rung on the ladder of discipleship. Evangelism is not the sole property of the Gospel, discipleship is. Therefore it's wrong that we say the Gospel is only for the unbeliever and now that he's saved we have to teach him other stuff and get him educated in the Word of God. The Word of God is the Gospel! Every doctrine of this New Testament is a doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. A pastor's main responsibility is to preach the Gospel to the believers.

Every Sunday my job is to preach the Gospel to you. I may do so by preaching on worship or discipleship or giving or on the church, but every message is to be the Gospel. Why? Because that's how the church grows—by speaking the Gospel in love. Paul said the same thing to his student Timothy,

"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."
(2 Timothy 4:5)

Most people believe Paul was telling Timothy that he needed to go outside the church and start doing some soul winning. While that is good and necessary, it is not Paul's emphasis. He was re-

mind Timothy that the role of a pastor needed to evangelize the church because the Gospel is the consistency of the Christian message. Do the work of the evangelist and tell your people the Good News week after week after week. Tell them what God has done, what He is doing, and what He can do for them. That's your job, Timothy. Keep them in the Gospel, because only by the Gospel will they grow.

The Gospel applies to every circumstance a Christian faces. I want to conclude by giving you a few New Testament examples of how this works.

B. New Testament Examples:

This is very practical, so please listen.

1. The Gospel gives the answer to marriage issues. (Ephesians 5)

When Paul wanted to teach on marriage, how did he do it? By teaching the Gospel. I didn't learn this until several years ago, but I wish I would have known it when I was first saved. If somebody comes to you for help in their marriage, what do you do? Take them to the Gospel. That's what Paul did. There is nobody who knew more about the Gospel than Paul. Even Peter said some of the things Paul says about the Gospel are hard to understand. So if this is what Paul did, with that gigantic brain of his, then, buddy, I'm not going to wrestle with it. There's no decision, no discussion, no debate, I'm going to give you the Gospel. That's what Paul does.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her," (Ephesians 5:22-25)

It's the Gospel. You want to know how to be a good husband? Then, sir, learn how to die for your wife. That's what Jesus did.

2. The Gospel gives the answer to financial issues. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Paul had been promised a year earlier by the church at Corinth that they were going to give to the relief fund for the poor Jews in Judea, but times had gotten difficult for them and they were stingy, and didn't want to keep their promise for giving. How does Paul deal with financial selfishness? He preaches the Gospel.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

All a Christian needs to know about finances is found in the Gospel. Every one of us has a stingy streak in us. Tight-fistedness comes naturally to us. Watch two children play and you'll see it.

“That’s mine!”

“No, it’s mine!”

“No it’s mine!”

What’s the answer? Jesus was rich, “but for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might be rich.” If you would just learn that about your finances, you would not have financial problems. That doesn’t mean you may not have days where you have nothing in the cupboards. That doesn’t mean you may not be tested. But God will always come through for you because the Bible says if He’s willing to lose everything for you, He will give you all you need. That’s your financial plan. There’s no better retirement plan than that. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” But we don’t want to live by faith, remember? We turn to something other than the Gospel for financial stability.

3. The Gospel gives the answer to relationship problems. (Philippians 2:1-8)

In Philippians 2:1-8 we have perhaps one of the most profound statements about the Gospel you’ll ever find. I’m not exaggerating. Over the centuries, millions of pages have been written, printed, and published on these verses and what they mean concerning the Gospel. But when Paul wrote them he wasn’t necessarily trying to give a lesson about the Gospel in as much as he was trying to use the Gospel as a lesson to heal some conflict between two women in a local church. You read about it in chapter four. These two women, who had even helped Paul in his ministry, had a division about something. In my mind it probably had something to do with the church. It probably wasn’t something frivolous. Both believed they were right concerning something in that church. How does Paul deal with friction in relationships between believers?

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ² fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:1-8)

A million pages have been written about those verses and all Paul is doing is trying to bring two ladies together in the church. Why? Because the Gospel solves every human issue there is.

Here’s the application. If everyone in this church practiced the Gospel it would mean that when you have conflict with a brother or sister you would strive to be the first to humble yourself and concede to the other. Why? That’s the Gospel. It’s no wonder the world is wondering about you and me; they hear what we say but also see what we do and there is a gap. You’ve got a problem with somebody? If you had the mindset of Christ and His Gospel-orientation, you would be will-

ing to suffer humiliation if need be in order to make sure that brother or sister is helped and edified. But what do we do? We start attacking, chipping away, and criticizing.

4. The Gospel gives the answer to unfairness, injustice and suffering. (1 Peter 2:18cf)

Peter shows us that Christ is the example, for when He was reviled He didn't revile back. If you've been wrongly beaten, Jesus was wrongly beaten (1 Peter 2:18-23).

We must learn to become Gospel-conscious. This must be the new paradigm, Oak Grove. This is to be the paradigm by which you see your life. This is the lens by which we must view the world. You have to bring every issue of your life under the microscope of the Gospel, asking the Holy Spirit to show you Jesus. "Show me how Jesus did this in the Gospel. Show me how the Gospel answers this," because it does. What we have to do is learn how to renew the mind and think this way. It doesn't happen automatically. It's going to take some time. We're in the process of doing that. That's why I've called this a year of transition. We're transitioning to stop thinking like a traditional church and beginning to think like a New Testament church, where each member is thinking according to a Gospel-orientation. When that happens, we'll start growing spiritually and numerically.

Last week I didn't give you the definition of church. I gave you some clues, some hints, but I didn't put it all together. I want to do so today.

Church = A community of individuals who have been joined together by the Gospel for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel to each other and the world.

When you start adding more to that basic definition you usually drift away from the Gospel. There are a lot of churches, including this one, that have built their church on many things other than the Gospel alone. That's why we're not doing as well as we ought to. What is a church? The church is a Gospel-oriented community raised up to preach the Gospel to each other and to the world. How large is the Gospel in your sight? How big of a part does it play in your life? Amen.