

# Four Pillars of a Strong Church

## Pillar 4: “Passionate about People – Inside the Church”

Ephesians 3:20-4:16

### Part 1

Jesus is at work, I am convinced of that. He promised to build His church and he is doing that with us, His hand is all over us. And I feel like He is rallying all of us together and shaping us, making us one around His Word.

I really do feel like that as we have been talking about the pillars of a Healthy Church to which Pastor Tim built upon last week and really feeds into this week’s message where we will be talking about the growth of people inside the church.

**That’s** our fourth and final pillar where we will talk about being passionate for people inside the church, which is the edification or the building up of the saints of God.

That’s our topic for today and then next week we will talk about being passionate for lost people outside the church.

But what we are after today is true growth, deep growth that can only happen if we do it God’s way.

There are countless church growth books out there, and I appreciate all of them that are based on this book, but there are those that are not that produce shallow growth because as Pastor Tim said, they are more concerned about a big crowd rather than devoted disciples.

And I have to say as a leader, when I stand before Jesus at the end of my days, he isn’t going to ask me how many people attended your church, he is going to judge me based on how effective we were for equipping and shepherding souls.

When a young preacher complained to Charles Spurgeon that his own congregation was too small, Spurgeon replied, “Well, maybe it is as large as you’d like to give account for in the day of judgment.”

That changes how you will approach ministry.

From spending a whole lot of time trying to figure out the best ways to keep people entertained, or adopting every kind of ministry fad that comes along. Listen, that does not produce spiritual maturity. Willow Creek found this out after years of doing ministry this way.

And I appreciated that they acknowledged this and they desire to change praise God.

Now, I thought about this concept as I was working on my car last week. I usually do routine maintenance like changing the oil, air filters, spark plugs, simple things.

But last week, the power window wasn’t working and I loathed the thought of how expensive it would be to have someone else fix it, right men. So I **thought**, You Tube will tell me how to do this. I watched the expert and said, I can do this.

So I went and got the part I needed and proceeded to do something I’ve never done before. I dragged the computer out into the garage and thought I’ll just watch the video as I do this, but the wireless connection was hiccupping and pausing...

...so I was tempted to say forget it, I’ll figure it out myself, and that’s when I got myself into trouble, missing a step or removing a part I didn’t have to.

Now I praise God that I came to my senses and figured out the computer problems and watched the expert step by step and now the window works great. But here’s the point. We need to listen closely to what the Lord of the Church has said to us about how a church is to grow.

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 3, we will start with verse 20 and just highlight some things through chapter 4 verse 10, and then we will really

focus in on verses 11 through 16. If you want to use the pew Bible, it's on page 1158. I'll be reading from the English Standard Version.

Verse 20 is the tail end of Paul's prayer for the **Ephesian** church, where he says, and you know it well:

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The reason I wanted to start there was because God intends to do great things through us, through His church. Remember what Pastor Tim said last week, we will do even greater things than Jesus, not that we are greater than Jesus...

...but now on a wider and larger global scale, through His followers in the church, he empowers us to do great things which will bring Him glory. **Please** listen, God intends for His glory to be mainly seen through His church, through us, as His body, together...

...if in fact we submit to the mastery of the spirit in our individual lives, yes, that brings him glory too, but also our lives within our family, the church. Do you realize that this thing of the church is so big...that

...all of heaven is watching us, back up to verse 10, ...through the church the manifold wisdom of God (speaking of the gospel being unveiled) might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. We are not alone. We are being watched.

Peter tells us angles long to look into this thing that God has done and is doing in the gospel and in the church. It's incredible. This tells me a number of things:

Number one, the **church** is immensely important to Jesus and it should be immensely important to anyone who follows Jesus; **number** 2, we are

part of the most powerful unmovable, unshakeable king and kingdom in the entire universe that wows even the angels.

And **lastly**, it's through the church that primarily gives God glory. We need to reverse the negativity hurled at the local church. We need to rebuke any kind of notion that separates Jesus from the local church. We need to love the church and understand it's importance.

Paul did and it's because of this you can feel Paul falling on his knees and writing through tears to the church of Ephesus, not just individuals, but to a church, verse 4...

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, (meaning I have given up everything for my Jesus, including going to prison but I don't care because He gave everything up for me and I'm going to preach the gospel everywhere I go, plant churches and bring him glory)...

...and for you church of Ephesus...I...

urge (please do this...he's not commanding, he's urging because he wants them to do this out of a devoted heart to Christ, not out of legalism) you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

We have to get this right brothers and sisters; **it is** a privilege to be here in the church of Jesus Christ. First of all, it's a privilege to be a Christian.

We did not come on our own, it's not our own good decision that brought us here, we didn't become Christians on our own. We were sinners and enemies of God, but in his goodness...

...toward you and I, he called us out of our darkness, sent the Spirit of God to open our eyes and heart to the work of His Son and we begged for forgiveness and eternal life and to become part of God's family...

...and it's because of His goodness toward us even when he had every right to destroy us, we want to walk in a way that honors and glorifies him...walk meaning how we live in the everyday mundane things of life and here in this context...**church life**...how we walk together...verse 2...

<sup>2</sup> with all humility (which is always considering others better than ourselves and is characterized by giving not taking) and gentleness (having a mild spirit, peaceful, loving, not overbearing, quick to listen, you have control of yourself and your tongue) with patience,

(the Greek word literally means long-tempered, even keeled, not quick to anger or ungodly judgment, but able to...)

...bear with one another in love, (or another translation says “to show tolerance for one another in love.” Not a tolerance in the sense of our culture’s use of it where we tolerate any kind of teaching or behavior, but tolerance for each other’s quirkiness that isn’t necessarily sin...

...or it can mean restoring a sinner gently...(Galatians 6:1) walking slowly with someone.) Peter says to his readers, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins). I’m convinced that a good church hangs together even during tough times...

...that’s why I am so proud of you all for hanging in there with us through the past 4 years as we had to work through some very tough things. That’s a work that only God can do as He worked within us individually and as a church. Praise Him.

I think we strove for verse 3, but let’s continue to strive for it even more as we move ahead. **Let’s** be...

<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain (meaning Christ has already given this to His people through the Spirit) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. If we belong to Christ, the same Holy Spirit that resides in you resides in your neighbor, and resides

in me. And so we want to be mastered by the One Spirit as we submit to the One Word that He has authored for us. And as we all seek to learn and obey this one book, we will be more unified and have more peace.

And we will be able to discern which doctrines we fight over and which ones we give grace over. It's all part of Christian growth and we are all on different levels, but always remember verse 4...

<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

There's close to 500 people in our church and for all of that diversity, we worship one Lord, belong to one Lord who died for all of us, one faith, one baptism, we all read the One book. That's amazing to me. And then you extend that to the universal church all over the world...billions.

And under this one God that we all serve and the one faith that we hold to, the one Spirit who's in each one of us, the next verse says that he **uniquely** gifts each one of us. Verse 7...

<sup>7</sup> But grace (something that's not deserved) was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. If you belong to Christ, He's given you a gift and you have something to offer to the church body.

You can't say that you have nothing to offer, that's saying you don't believe the Bible.

Now if you don't know what that gift is, take our networking course, I would say take it anyway, or just do something and find out.

Listen, Jesus went to earth and back for this to happen. That's how much he loves the church and wants to see himself manifested in the church through the gifts of His people. Verse 8, quoting from Psalm 68...

<sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high (referring to his ascension after the resurrection) he led a host of captives, (he conquered Satan and sin and now being the victorious king with the spoils of victory)...and he gave gifts to men.”

Remember when he was glorified, he said that He would send the Spirit who would give gifts and empower people to work together to do even greater things through the church. And that includes us...And so now Paul will interject this thought in verses 9 and 10.

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? I personally believe that’s his incarnation, not hell) <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

He still does brothers and sisters to this day! He does right now and He has given each one of us a gift to be used in the church so that we can know more fully who He is, so that through each other we can become more like Him and that our church can display more of His character.

More so than what we can do alone.

Do you see how important this is for the glory of God and for Him to be made known through the church? I love the church and love to see a church grow and put God on display.

And so what I want to do now is talk about how that **growth** happens! He mentions some of the gifts that he gives, but I want you to also notice the progression to a healthy growing body of believers that displays the glory of God. How the **progression** works. Look at verse 11...

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

And so as we saw last week, **Jesus** gives leaders for the church. It has to begin there. Now Apostles and Prophets are debated, could be the

original guys who wrote the Scriptures and spoke the very words of God.

Chapter 2 of Ephesians verse 20 says that the members of the household of God have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

Others see prophet as a proclaimer of God's word which I'm ok with, I'm not OK with modern day apostles who put themselves on the same par as the original apostles and who say they have a word from the Lord that is equal in authority with the Bible. So Apostles and Prophets.

Paul also mentions evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. One group brings them in, another grows them up. All believers are called to evangelize, but some are immensely gifted and focused on evangelism and can train others to evangelize.

2 brothers that come to mind are John Kohnlein and Shawn Van Doren, 2 brothers committed to the work of evangelism. Every church needs these people.

We will talk more about evangelism next week, but any church will die if we don't evangelize.

Now obviously what we should see in our churches today is that of shepherds and teachers. The NASB says pastors and teachers. Usually the two go together but it doesn't always have to be, it can mean any leadership office of teaching.

But since elder and teaching go together quite often in the Bible, that's the understanding we will go with here.

But since we have talked a lot about the importance and necessity of eldership in the local church, I'm not going to go into detail about that, but it is essential to have a plurality of spiritual leaders in the church who are your elders, teaching and shepherding.



In our study as an elder board, we learned that...

essentially the Bible calls forth elders to shepherd a church by 1. Knowing the flock 2. Watching for danger and any false teaching 3. Feeding the flock with the word of God 4. Helping a flock heal and become healthy and 5. Discipline if necessary.

That's the role of an elder over his flock, now **verse 12** adds to this. Leaders are...

<sup>12</sup> to equip (you) the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

So you see the progression. Equip people, so people can serve, and building begins for everyone which is the goal.

Now the word equipping literally means to be made complete. Now we will never be perfectly holy or complete on this side of heaven, but we strive for it. Paul would say to the Corinthians, "Finally brothers, rejoice, be made complete."

Or he writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10, "Now I exhort you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Now I want to say this, a church full of people will never accomplish that without the careful and competent instruction of God's word through pastors and teachers that are all unified around that Word.

So the first tool to accomplish this, says John MacArthur of equipping is constant feeding on God's word by the pastor himself and then feeding the people with it.

A second tool he would say, would be constant prayer, our 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar. Remember the first apostles, they constantly gave themselves to the apostles teaching and to prayer.

Paul wrote this about another partner in ministry, he is “always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.” I found this to be convicting.

And I think this could be a challenge to our elder board, we do well in preaching and teaching, and we do pray for all of you...

...but I’m wondering if we need to take more time and pray specifically through the directory, that each of you may stand perfect and assured in the will of God. They may shoot me at our next elder’s meeting...

...but I’ve always appreciated other pastors and their elder boards who pray for each one in their directory. This has to be a leader’s goal. It was Paul’s goal...

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” That may mean more late nights for us. Colossians 1:28 & 29.

The way we get people to maturity is through **preaching and prayer**. And so I want to remind all of us, we need to be careful that we do not bog our spiritual leaders down...

...and I’m thinking about Pastor Tim as he comes in, we cannot burn our spiritual leaders out by expecting them to be involved in every activity and program, and managing these things to the neglect of prayer and preaching and teaching.

That will lead not only to burned out pastors and elders but the wrong kind of growth because preachers and elders can only give what they have themselves and if they are not feeding themselves because they are so bogged down, they can’t feed you.

The way the Lord’s people are destroyed is not a lack of programs, but a lack of a knowledge of His Word (Hosea 4:6).

And for the programs and activities that we do have, please don't misunderstand me, I'm not against those things that are drawn out of the Word of God, but we now come to what Paul said should happen after the preaching and teaching of the leaders. **Your service** to the church.

Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. No pastor or elder board can do everything and that's not what God intended for his church. If he did, all the gifts would be given to them.

Now, as I look out at all of you, many of you are serving in some capacity or another. And so I think in many ways, Ebenezer is right on track to good deep growth. I see many teachers, whether it's children, youth, YACS, or Adult Sunday School.

I see deacons who serve in all kinds of ways. I see people who write cards of encouragement, or make meals for other people. I see mentors, and informal counselors. I see people who I know are evangelizing others outside of our walls.

I see people who are good at hospitality, or helping coordinate our ministries. Serving in the sound room, or serving on our worship team and choir. And so I don't want to dog Ebenezer as if no one is serving, that's simply not true.

So for those of you who are serving, thank you, and know that you are part of displaying the great glory of God through the local church, and you are investing in treasure laid up for you that will last forever.

Now I do want to dog those of you who are not serving. Here's what I want you to do.

**Number 1**, if you are not convinced of church membership so you can be plugged in and accountable, I want you to read this little book. "Church membership by Jonathan Leeman and then I would encourage you to talk to Pastor Dick about taking a membership class.

**Secondly**, I want you to go home and read Romans chapter 12 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12 about spiritual gifts.

**And then** I would love for you to talk to Andy Brimer about taking our networking class to help you discover what your spiritual gifts are and then just start doing stuff and you will find out what gifts the Lord has given you.

Please do that because we want true growth, we want deep growth for everyone that brings the manifestation of the presence of Christ, His joy, His love, His peace, His oneness that we are all after. It's a beautiful thing. "Works of service, for building up the body of Christ."

Do you see the progression...everything flows out of the preaching and teaching of God's Word from the leaders to the people, equipping them with the same word that they can effectively serve others with what they have been served with. **Until** everyone is mature.

That's what Paul is after starting with verse 13...

<sup>13</sup> **until** we all attain to the unity of the faith (our doctrine, what we believe, doctrine is important, it's important to be unified in our doctrine...

...I know that some say doctrine divides and sometimes it does, and it's good to discern between what's essential for salvation and what are distinctives...

...and somehow God works through the differences in distinctions to further his kingdom but all Christians should be attempting to submit to what God has said in his Scripture and be mature enough to be able to handle the differences in distinctives with grace.

So we try to attain unity in the faith, **and of** the knowledge of the Son of God (knowledge there means a full knowledge, a deeper knowledge of the things of Jesus, not just salvation, but deeper things which only comes through consistent study of our Master's words),

Which will result in... mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...where not only do we know the deep things of the Lord, but we deeply look like him because we also obey His Word.

God's agenda is to conform each one of us into His Son's image. And as one **author** said, "The church in the world is Jesus Christ in the world, because the church is now the fullness of His incarnate Body in the world."

We are to be the aroma of Christ. We are to reflect His character. We are to walk as he walked, individually yes, but even more fully all of us together with all of our gifts to display more fully who he is.

But listen, we can only do this as the Spirit of God and the Word of God masters our lives. That's why we teach and model...verse 14...

<sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Another translation says human trickery which comes from the idea of dice playing used by professional gamblers...you know...you will never win with trick dice and your gullible enough to just accept it because it looks right.

Children can be gullible right because of a lack of knowledge. I remember one person saying they were tricked as a kid about mince meat pie. They were told that it was chopped up bugs and to this day they won't eat mince meat pie.

**That comes** from a lack of knowledge and I fear in the church today, there is a severe lack of knowledge of God's Word which leads to health and wealth gospels, to false conversions to giving our money to the Benny Hinn types, to an unbiblical model of church growth.

And it can be a subtle working. I remember reading one of Rob Bell's first books that downplayed doctrine a bit too much for my taste, not

everything he said was off, but it lead down a wrong path to his recent book on hell that's outraged a good number of Christian people.

All that to say this. We are told over and over again about false teachers in the Bible.

Now I'm not after witch hunting on the finer points of doctrine, but we must keep our guards up and believe that there will be false teachers in every age, including our own, and they can even be within our own fellowship.

We can't tolerate false teaching on the essential doctrines of the faith. But the only way we can sort this out is to study the word together with leaders and teachers so that we can develop a discerning mind and spirit and then pass it on to others and build, build, build..

Now I say that about doctrine, **only** to combine with what Paul says next in verse 15.

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, (we need both of these, the opposite is either a lack of truth or a lack of compassion)

we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> 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.

So from the preaching of the word and loving the people flowing down from the elders into the congregation so that they are equipped with the same thing...

...and as they exercise and pass on their knowledge and love along with whatever gift the Lord has given them to serve the church, we all grow into maturity and look like Jesus on earth. Amen!

I'll finish with an illustration on cars again. I **mentioned** that I change the oil. When I was younger, I changed the oil in our van and we took a

trip with grandma and grandpa over the mountain to a restaurant. Now I have never had a problem when I changed the oil.

But on the way back, the engine light kept coming on so dad was naturally asking, what did you do? And on the wrong side of the mountain we parked the van. Crawled under and found the problem.

When I put the new filter on, the rubber ring from the old filter was still attached so it didn't seal properly and the oil leaked out. That's all it was, a rubber seal and 6 people were stranded.

Here's the point, whether you are a leader steering the car or riding in the car, or whether you are a smaller unsung hero like a little rubber ring on the filter, you are needed for the whole car to function properly. Paul uses the illustration of the human body to explain this.

For Ebenezer to become all that she is to become, yes we need the leaders to equip, but we **need the saints** for the work that goes on here so that we can build up everyone and present everyone mature to Jesus Christ on that day. That is how real growth will happen.

And it has to be a perpetual cycle, evangelize to edify, so they can evangelize and edify. That's the purpose of our existence.

Next week we will talk about a passion for lost people, who us the edified need to go after, to evangelize and build up and the kingdom of Christ continues to advance.