

Ephesians 4:11 - Growing in Christ

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[0:00] One departed Dave Quilla was in Pakistan.! So in terms of the safety assignments, Dave drew the short straw.! I was in the Philippines, he was in Pakistan.

But all that to say, I think if you've been at Providence for any length of time, you understand how that ministry to those pastors in Pakistan started in Providence through a particular family at first and then spread throughout Providence.

And so there was this moment where I'm in the Philippines, Dave is in Pakistan. We're both training pastors. And it's just this moment of extraordinarily punching above our weight.

As a small local church, God had been really good to us, and I wanted to pass that particular moment on to you. Because some of you are long-timers, and you can think about how this trajectory has unfolded.

Another layer of that I needed to convey. One of the guys that I took with me on this trip was a man named Ron Boonsma, who is the pastor of a church in Pasadena, Sovereign Grace Pasadena.

[1:08] And that church actually started Providence 23 years ago. It was the church that planted Providence something like 23 years ago. So that was happening simultaneously.

And then one other thing that's not as magical that I want to reference is, in June, myself and Josh Montague, my friend who leads these trips, he and I are kind of the two of the primary people Josh leads, he and I are going to do, we're going to start teaching you the method that we're using with the Philippians.

And so we will actually have a seminar, a weekend seminar in June, where we can start teaching local churches how to read the Bible in the same way we're teaching senior pastors, and so on and so forth.

So that's all very exciting. Open your Bibles to the book of Ephesians, chapter 4. Chapter 4, verse 11.

We read this and then we'll pray. 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, 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 fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

[2:42] Rather, let me pause there just to point out this word. I don't know if I'll return to it. The word rather here means, in essence, you have two choices. Either you're going to be tossed to and fro by every wind and wave, or you can do the thing that comes after.

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.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for all the many ways you have been so kind to us, Father. Father, not simply through kind of, you know, the nice frothy blessings that everybody enjoys, the cotton candy level blessings.

We're grateful for those. They're great. But also, God, thank you for the deeper, harder things you've had us walk through as individuals, as friends, as a church, because in all of these layers of your blessings, God, you keep showing us more and more of Christ.

And it's him, Lord, that we want to grow up into. We pray, God, that you would continue that work even in this sermon. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, this passage has a lot to say about growth.

[4:06] The word growth appears twice in this particular passage, and it appears elsewhere in the book of Ephesians as well. I would say when I was younger, hearing the word growth always kind of just immediately went to the positive.

When I hear something's growing, I think, oh, good. That sounds good. But I feel like as I've gotten older, I hear the word growth more like the way a dermatologist hears the word growth. You know, maybe even sometimes the way an oncologist hears the word growth. It's not, I still think it's probably mostly a positive word in my heart, but not nearly as positive as it used to be. I feel like a lot of us have seen things grow and then just shrivel. A lot of things grow in ways that weren't good, that maybe we thought they were good initially.

And, you know, Jesus is so good. Like, this is a category he covers. I'm not sure we're always paying attention, but this is a category he covers in the Gospels all the time. His parable of the sowers is really meant to temper our hearts to understand that not all growth winds up being good.

[5:17] Not all growth winds up being true. Not all growth winds up being good. And yet, I think the point of that parable is that some growth is good.

There's a certain kind of growth that is good. All that to say, as I've gotten older, like in a lot of other areas, is the concept of growth itself, it's just more nuanced than it used to be.

And that definitely pertains to the concept of church growth. I remember Angela was pregnant with Sarah or Brooke, and I was in a Bible class where this slick professor, he wasn't really a professor, he was a pastor, they brought in to teach a class.

It was a church growth class. And he was teaching us through Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren. And I'm 20 years old, and I'm reading this, and I'm thinking, it's all so simple.

Why doesn't everybody just do this? And then all the churches would grow. So I started at a very simplistic, Pollyannish kind of way of thinking about church growth, and have sensed, I would say, I'm probably very dermatological in my understanding of church growth now.

[6:34] There's lots of growth that ain't any good. But there's still some growth that is. And that's kind of what this passage is doing for us. It's telling us what kind of growth is good.

If you look back at verse 11, we have this list of offices, list of officers in the church. And I mean, especially like the last three, they all point to particular kinds of growth.

Evangelist, well, that keys in my mind, numerical growth. Shepherds, that keys in my mind, relational growth. A shepherd is someone who keeps the sheep together, because the sheep are supposed to be together.

Teachers, that makes me think of theological growth. But I want to suggest that none of these things, none of these three things, numerical growth, relational growth, or theological growth, are in and of themselves good things.

I want to suggest that none of those three, relational growth, theological growth, or numerical growth, are in and of themselves good things.

[7:46] I think something else is necessary, something essential is necessary to make growth good. And if we look back through the text, I would say that that thing is necessary is Christ.

You have all of these phrases in this section of Scripture that just keep constantly referring to Christ. Building up the body of Christ, the knowledge of the Son of God, the fullness of Christ. Grow up into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, so on and so forth. Christ is everywhere in this passage. He's not mentioned once as a nice addition to the growth that's happening here.

He is the central figure of the growth that's happening in this passage. I thought of it this way. You look at the directional language. Just look back at that passage, if you have it up here or in your Bibles.

Look at the directional signals in that section of Scripture, verses 11 through 16. The body we're building is the body of Christ. He is the substance of it.

[8:49] The knowledge we're growing into is the knowledge of the Son of God. He is the content of it. The maturity we're measuring ourselves against is the fullness of Christ. He is the standard of it.

Verse 15, we are to grow up into Him. Christ is out ahead of us. He's our destination. Verse 16, from whom the whole body is joined and held together.

Christ is behind us. He's the source. This is just glorious. Paul is describing a world where there is no direction that you can look and not see Christ.

Do you understand what a good church is, friends? It's that. An environment in which there is no direction that you can look, that's what see Christ.

Christ is everywhere you look. That's what Paul's talking about. He's the ground beneath the body. He's the goal in front of the body. He's the substance that the church is made out of.

[9:47] He's the ruler, the measurement that you hold up against to see whether or not you're maturing. He is everything in this passage. And that's what makes growth good.

That's what makes numerical growth good. And without that, it ain't good. That's what makes relational growth good. But without that, without Christ, relational growth is not good.

That's what makes theological growth good. But without Christ, growth in doctrine is not good.

That's the key for today. To get a refined understanding, a discerning understanding of what good growth is, and then learn to seek that in our lives, in our relationships, and in the church.

That's what we're doing today. And I think this is essential for a number of reasons, and I'll try to make application for some of this. is numerical growth an automatic good?

Well, this gets back to me as a 20-year-old. If you'd asked me then, I'd have said, oh, of course. Of course numerical growth is an automatic good. But I think many of us, not just me, now here, this or that, church is growing, and we think dermatologically.

[11:09] We think, well, what exactly is it that's growing? Why is it growing? We've learned, I think, especially in this congregation, some discernment in particular about the word church growth and explicitly about numerical growth.

Let's be frank. God has blessed us. We are growing. But if you were using numerical growth as your gauge, you would be somewhere else. So I think everybody here, I think it's kind of a self-selecting thing.

I think we all have some extra level of discernment at that particular point of application. But my job is not to preach to the people who aren't here.

I'm thinking, okay, we know that. What don't we know? I wonder if we are as equally aware that neither relational growth or theological growth is good if it isn't in Christ.

I would say that's most likely our particular blind spot. I think we are rightly cautious, at least at the discernment level, not negative against it, but just thoughtful about when someone says, our church is really growing numerically, we immediately think, okay, I would want to hear more.

[12:21] But I would tell you that sometimes when we hear that this or that church is growing, we think, but are they growing closer or are they growing in theology? I would say that reveals our own blind spots because the only question that ever really matters is, are they growing in Christ?

Is this numerical growth in Christ? Is this relational growth in Christ? Is this doctrinal growth in Christ? So I think our particular blind spot is that we have areas where we would automatically hear the word growth and think, well, that's good.

I'd say, not so fast, Bucko. Is what's happening in Christ. Now, I want to tell you, I think there's a few ways to apply this.

First would be this. In the beginning of that passage, in verse 11, you have the list of offices. And I just want to point out that literally every one of those offices in the Bible have a counterfeit.

There's false teachers. There's false prophets. There's false shepherds. There's false apostles. All of these have a counterfeit.

[13:31] And I just want to suggest to you that you need to be thoughtful about this at two levels. One, there's the fake. There's the really obvious counterfeit that are like, they're saying stupid stuff. They're

flying to the Philippines on a private jet and not staying where I stayed.

Like, you know, there's the obvious false, but I think we need to just take a moment and just resensitize ourselves to the less obvious false. And the less obvious false are people that teach true doctrine, teach a true gospel, but are not pointing people to Jesus all the time.

Those people would also be false because the role of all of these offices is not merely to teach or evangelize or shepherd. The role of all of these offices is to teach people and point people to Christ. If you look at that context, and Dove covered this last week, but if you look at that context, you can see that these offices are God's gift to the church, but that gift is supposed to be the gift that keeps on giving one particular gift, the gift of all gifts.

That is the knowledge of Jesus Christ. I was thinking this week about like what constitutes a skill. Like how do you know if you're actually good at something versus like say just the average person? [14:54] How do you know you're better at something than the average person? And I heard someone say this. I thought, well, this is really interesting. This was the definition. What do you find easy that other people find hard?

Like that's a good, if you're trying to figure out what you're good at, like that's a good, that's a good trail to follow. And I was thinking about the Apostle Paul and how he was good at so many things. He was good at philosophy. He was good at rhetoric. He was good at logic. He was good at theology. He was zealous. He was thoughtful. He was, he was good at a lot of stuff that a lot of us find hard.

And then Paul says, I consider all of it done compared to what? The surpassing knowledge, the surpassing glory of knowing Christ.

This is the point. Knowing Christ is the point. And so one of the things we should do as we think about leaders is ask that simple question. Is this leader in any capacity within the church, is this person showing me Christ?

[16:01] Is this person leading me to Christ? Because that's why God gave them these offices to the church. Second point of application just so far. And that would be this. I think we really, as Christians at this church, need to be kind, careful, but insistent that our fellow Christian friends start measuring growth in a godly, Christ-centered way.

And I'm speaking of people who attend our church, but also we have plenty of friends who attend other churches. And here's what I'm concerned about. I believe that there are many Christians who are not being taught to properly calibrate growth and measure growth.

And they're going to places and they're involved in ministries that have one of these secondary things happening. It's a church that's growing relationally. It's a church that's growing theologically. It's a church that's growing numerically. And from their perspective, because they've not been taught on this stuff, they're thinking, this is obviously God's blessing because look at the growth. And I think we, as friends of fellow Christians, need to say, that's wonderful. I'm glad your parking lot is crowded. I'm glad you've parsed Greek words this week.

[17:14] I'm glad you have a great community group full of relational closeness. But all of that growth is only good if it is making much of Jesus Christ.

And friends, I really think we need to be kind to those in our lives to remind them of that very thing. And here's why I think it's some urgency. Remember how I referenced at verse 14, it's the being tossed to and fro bit there.

And then I said verse 15 starts with this pivot. Rather, here's the deal. If you're not living a Christ-centered life, you're building a house that will be blown down by a storm. If you're not attending a Christ-centered church, you're attending a church that will, in one way or another, collapse.

And so man, I think the greatest gift we could give our friends and our family is to encourage them to keep Christ-centered. Because it really is either or.

Either we build our lives on Christ, the cornerstone that the builders rejected that will not crumble or fail, the kingdom that cannot be shaken, or we are in verse 14 of Ephesians 4 ready to be tossed to and fro.

[18:28] And I think it's just an act of kindness to perform a sort of routine relational hygiene with our friends and say, is your life centered on Jesus Christ? I hear about all the growth, but is your life centered on Jesus Christ?

Application point number two, and that would be this. The notion of growing closer, I want to apply this to your marriage and to your family, the notion of growing closer is not in and of itself an obvious good.

The notion of growing closer to your spouse or to your family is not in and of itself an obvious good. Families or couples growing closer is not always a positive.

Here's the reality. There are plenty of families that are a problem precisely because they are close. I'm thinking of the Gambinos, the Castros, the Habsburgs. I could name many families that are close and they're more of a problem to themselves and to the world because they are close.

Let me say this. Close marriages are not good simply because they are close-knit. Growing in closeness is not an ultimate good in your marriage.

[19:43] If Christ isn't the aim of the growth of closeness in your marriage, hear me well, ladies. Hear me well, men. Hear me well, young couples.

If Christ is not the aim of your marital closeness, you are building an idol and it will not go well for you.

I'm not trying to scare you. I'm just letting you know. Do not worship family closeness for the sake of family closeness.

If it is not built on Christ, for Christ, and toward Christ, it is not good growth. Not good relational growth.

Okay. So now, what do we do? We've been very clearly told from this passage it's an either-or deal and the only kind of growth that's good is the growth in Christ.

[20:48] Well, this passage actually just gives us several markers of how we can make progress both as individuals and in our varied relationships growing in Christ.

And the first one, back to verse 11, is just, we are in desperate need. If we are going to experience Christ-centered growth, we must have Christ-centered leaders.

We have to. Whatever institution we want God to bless, we need to prioritize Christ-centered leaders. You might think, well, gosh, you know, what is it like for, you know, I helped stand up an orphanage way back in the day, in my young days, when kids were young and Angela was, she was even busier, you know, in some respects than she is now.

And I would be in Africa for a month every once in a while. That's not an endorsement for everybody in this room to do that. There's a lot of wisdom and thoughtfulness that go into making that decision, and I'm not even arguing that I made the right one.

what I'm arguing is this. I have an exceptional wife, not because she lets me do the things I want to do, but because she has always understood that we have to pursue Christ.

[22:07] That's the goal. We have to pursue Christ. Not her ideal vision of a marriage, not her ideal vision of a home, not her ideal vision of a relationship.

we are about pursuing Christ. So, one of the things we need are just people who lead things to say, I am most concerned about this thing I'm leading growing into Christ.

My wife has let me try to do that. I'm not saying I've always succeeded by any means, but she has supported me as I've tried to lead my home into Christ.

Not into the latest Hallmark Fantasy, not into Instaclose, not into Relationships for the Gram, but we were adults even at 20 who were pursuing Jesus Christ.

And that has made a huge difference in our lives. The second thing, and you can just apply that, I already talked about that at the church level. The second thing we need are Christ-serving members.

[23:22] There in the next section you see that God gave these gifts, these officers to the church so that they could in turn equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

The word for ministry there is a word closely associated with priesthood. And this is one of the places where we get the very concept so key in the reformation of the priesthood of the believers. Now, all too often, strong-headed people who don't like to submit to authority will say, priesthood of the believers as, I don't have to listen to you. Priesthood of the believers fundamentally means it's your job to serve Christ under the authority of the offices which God created and gave the church. That's what that verse says. So how do we grow in Christ? We grow in Christ with Christ-centered leaders who equip the members to serve Christ in their priestly ministry roles.

This verse fits actually in the Greek and theologically perfectly with something like 1 Peter 2.9. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, called to proclaim his excellencies.

[24:32] Like, the whole idea of this section is that God has enabled, empowered, through his offices, a whole congregation full of priest, priestly people who are serving Christ when they go to the nursery and take care of someone else's kid or serving Christ when they run slides or serving Christ when they stand at the door and provide armed, well-armed security.

What's going on is we are priests under the Lord and so how does a church grow unto Christ or how does a family grow unto Christ? First of all, the leader has to be Christ-centered but then he has to teach the people how they, with their particular gifts and their particular peace within the body, can also serve Christ.

And there's a thing I missed in the slides and in my notes but I remembered it as I was standing there singing. There's another piece of this that I want to mention and that is, so first is Christ-centered leaders, second is Christ-serving members, but I want to be sure to mention something I didn't remember to put in my notes and that is Christ-centered markers of maturity. Look at verse 13 and pardon me, I brought the wrong version of my Bible as well. And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry to build up the body of Christ until we all reach, very small print here, unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

So the third point you're not going to see in the notes in the slides is we have to have a Christ-centered standard of maturity. When we ask who's growing, are they growing, we don't need to make this complicated, we just need to ask is so and so more like Christ?

[26:29] This year than they were last year. Our whole mission as a church, serving as both pastors and leaders and members, whatever team you're on, whatever ministry you do, the whole goal is to produce Christian maturity, Christ-like maturity.

And how is that maturity created? That maturity is created because in verse 15, or by in verse 15, speaking the truth in love, we grow in every way into him who is the head.

Again, you see Christ right there, speaking the truth in love, we grow in every way. Now this passage has been used to tone check people all the time.

You spoke the truth, but did you speak the truth in love? This verse doesn't mean that. I mean, there's plenty of Bible verses about gentleness and like we should aim to be gentle, but that's not what is happening here.

What this verse is actually just saying is, in fact, the word speak doesn't appear in the Greek, it just simply says, let us be truthing each other lovingly, or let us be truthing each other in love.

[27:41] The idea is that love is the environment that the truth happens in. It's really more of a community thing than a tone thing. And I think this is really important because I think, typically, our handling of this verse actually suppresses what Paul is after.

We have made speaking the truth in love into a standard so high that most people use it as a reason not to speak at all. If I'm not completely certain of my motive, if I can't guarantee it will land well, if there's a chance they'll push back, then maybe I should stay quiet.

Maybe I should let someone else do it. And what we wind up doing with this verse is we wind up creating an environment where very few godly people ever speak up and we can't grow into Christ unless we, as a body, are speaking truth in love to one another.

So the way that this verse has been applied is to make us all so careful about speaking that no speaking occurs and therefore no growth occurs. That's not what's going on here at all. And I want to kind of fast forward a little bit. I don't want to take too long in this sermon. I just want to say two things. I think you need to bear in mind two things. One, the day is coming when you will be judged not simply for what you have done but for what you failed to do.

[29:03] And you need to live your life with both lists in mind. And the day is coming when you will also be evaluated for what you have spoken and what you have failed to say. And you need to live your life with that in mind.

I just want to, at this point, I can't give you all the positive instruction necessary here but I just can dislodge some of the biases you might have. The truth is we have to have a community full of people who are speaking truth and love and if sometimes we don't execute that well, we should be so eager for Christian growth that we should say, you did a not so great job sharing the truth and love with me there.

Thank you though. We just need to get better at doing this. We have to stop creating an environment where the receiver of the word is the ultimate person who evaluates the goodness of the word.

That's not how this works. That's not how a healthy Christ-centered growing body works. And so, bear in mind, we have two things to deal with here.

We don't want to say stupid things. The Bible's clear that we will face judgment for saying stupid careless things but also we will face judgment for the many times we did not speak up and should have.

[30:19] So, I don't know what to tell you about that except personally you need to ask the Lord to help you with that. And then I think more simply, each one of us has a perverted view of Jesus that is made in our own image.

And if you are the kind who has an emphasis on gentleness then Jesus is the doesn't hurt a fly guy. And if you're the kind of person who has an emphasis on prophetic edge then you're the Jesus tossing tables guy.

That is a violation of the second commandment. We're not supposed to create a God in our own image. So what we do is we read the gospels routinely and we get exposed to the real Jesus and we're reminded those of us with the tendency to be too hard of how kind patient and gentle Jesus is and those of us who are too timid are reminded of the other.

My point is that even as we evaluate what does Christ-like speech look like? You just have to know Jesus and use Jesus as Paul says as the determination of maturity, as the standard upon which we judge.

And finally, I think the final piece of this was the one that surprised me the most. It's the one that caused me the most trouble and that is as we continue to progress into 15 and 16 we see this. 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.

[31:42] love. The phrase that caused me trouble is every joint with which it is equipped because it seems in the text to be a very necessary part of the growth that is happening.

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.

Now I have one advantage my whole life has been about joints not this kind. My whole life has been about joints. When I was a kid I had some kind of rheumatic fever set in and I don't know exactly what that was but by the time I was a teenager my hips were bad and when I was 16 I had all sorts of problems even as a kid.

And when I was 16 my left knee blew out and it was a really bad full hyperextension. So my knee goes this way and my knee went fully that way and I fell down on my foot pressed up like a puppet you know like a collapsed puppet and it tore everything in my left leg.

And all this to make it worse this if you know me this sounds this sounds right. That happened it was going to happen no matter what. I had a problem a physiological congenital problem but it happened because I was trying to impress a girl at the driving range and I took a really aggressive swing with the driver and so far from impressing her I look like a rag doll a heap on the ground.

[33:21] Anyway that knee thing happened when I was 16. To this day to this day I have a bad hip now I have a bad SI joint on this side I have a bad shoulder on this side because as one joint fails boom boom boom boom everything goes and so if I just didn't care what that dumb girl who I don't even remember her name now no.

So I read this and I thought okay I know I know kind of what he's saying and he's saying we are that connected. We are that connected. The joints have to work.

work. But I just couldn't figure out what is the joint itself that he's talking about. And so I just had to defer to multiple commentaries at this point and through thorough study and examining the Greek and so forth that the connection is the point.

I was thinking too deeply about it. The point is is the connection, the commitment. Your body wouldn't work if your parts weren't committed to each other.

That's the takeaway there. I mean I was making it too complicated but I do understand now the whole idea is like we don't function, we don't grow unless our parts are connected and what is that connection?

[34:49] It's just a covenantal commitment that mirrors the steadfast love of God. The joints in verse 16 are the relational connection, points between the members, the places where the supply of Christ actually gets transferred, where the body actually moves, where energy is actually transferred.

And the greatest enemy of this kind of steadfast covenantal commitment is consumerism. It's essentially like whatever it was that I had and we've got some other people that have had similar things, you get this disease and your joints just all get destroyed and it's like whatever that disease is biologically, what that is in the church is consumerism.

It causes the commitment levels that we're supposed to have with one another to fade. It causes a dysregulation.

Friends, I think we've all been in situations in local churches where the preaching wasn't exactly what we liked it to be, the community wasn't what we hoped it would be, the music wasn't what we hoped it would be, the worship wasn't growing as fast or the worship wasn't as compelling as we'd like it to be, and yet some of us are stayers and some of us are consumers.

That's pretty much the deal. We either decide to love the people in our body or we decide to love these other things.

[36:18] Like, it really can come down to that sometimes. By the way, that's not a universal. It's just a reality that consumerism is in the air we breathe, and it's something every one of us should be extremely mindful of as we move throughout the world, and we should just be asking, is my commitment to Christ's body rooted in a love for Jesus Christ, rooted in allowing Jesus Christ to love others through me, or am I a consumer?

One pastor who helped revitalize the dying church once said this, do you want to know that your Christian life is real? Commit yourself to a local group of saved sinners.

Try to love them. Don't just do it for three weeks. Don't just do it for six months. When he came to that church, it was nearly dead, that he was asked for his vision for the church at that time.

They're expecting some kind of silver bullet program, and he said simply this, preach, pray, love, stay. And he and his wife started shopping for cemetery plots nearby.

How does anything grow into Christ if it's not committed like Christ is committed to us? What I've learned over 30 years is this, the quintessence of Christian love is commitment.

[37:43] Sacrifice flows out of commitment. Everything flows out of commitment. Jesus died for us because he chose us before the foundation of the world. His death, his sacrifice for us, was downstream of his commitment to us. So how do we grow as a church?

We grow into Christ, and we grow into Christ because we have Christ-led leaders. We have a Christ-centered ministry among the saints. We have a Christ standard for maturity. We speak to one another in Christ-like ways, and we have a Christ-like commitment to one another.

And Paul ends this passage by saying, that we will be built up in love. Built up in love. What kind of love?

Here's a hint for you. When you read your New Testament, I haven't preached in two weeks. Give me five more minutes. When you read your New Testament, and you ever see an apostle mention the word love, you should immediately discipline your mind to think of Jesus Christ.

Because I sure guarantee you that's what they were thinking of as they wrote that word. Whenever you see the word love in the New Testament, get your mind disciplined to thinking of Jesus.

Because I promise you, every time that word was mentioned by these apostles, they couldn't help but think of him who walked with them and died for them and was raised with them.

[39:06] That's really what we see over and over again in Scripture, is when we say, let's grow as a church in love. Well, what are we using now? What are we using this week for our definition of love? We don't change our definition of love.

It hasn't changed in 2,000 years. The world's changes about every four or five years right now. But ours has been the same. 1 John 3, 16. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.

And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 1 John 4, 10. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

With that, we lead right into our celebration of the Lord's table and understand that everything we do should be in the shadow of the cross of Jesus Christ, where love was demonstrated and not only demonstrated, but imputed unto us so that we can go likewise and love the brothers.

Let's pray. Father God, we pray that as we observe your table now, Father, we pray that you would give us the grace to see Jesus and to see the great love you demonstrated for us and that while we were still sinners, you sent Christ to die for us.

[40:28] Lord, please make much of Jesus Christ in our church and in our homes. We ask these things in his name. Amen. Come and receive the elements. Take them back to your seat and we'll partake of them together.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.