

***Building Up Love***, Sam Ferguson, November 1, 2020

**Series Goal** | May our love for Christ, and Christ's love for us, foster a togetherness that bears witness to the Gospel of Hope, which we hold out to a weary and divided world.

**Key Scripture** | [Eph. 4:7-16](#)

### **Sermon Outline & Questions**

*Opening thoughts—*

Do you have a plan for your friend's life? A vision of what they will become? Or do you simply walk beside them and cheer them on?

We ought to have a profound goal for our brothers and sisters in the church—that they would grow up mature in Christ.

Love is the key way by which the church maintains unity. Last week we looked at the disposition of love (it is humble). This week, we turn to the outworking (experience) of humble love—it is a 'building up' love.

Love is not idle or indifferent; rather, it labors to build others up to be like Christ and to be more at peace with God.

*In what ways does our world today promote or reward 'idle love'? Is it difficult to love in a way that truly "labors" to build others up?*

*Structure of Ephesians 4:7-16—*

This 'building up' love comes to the fore in [Eph. 4:7-16](#).

Part I: vv. 7-10. We receive grace according to the measure of Christ's gifts (Eph. 4:7).

Part II: vv. 11-16. Paul explains the types of gifts and what they aim at. While the gifts include specific persons, Christ gives gifts to all persons within the church.

v. 12-16. Paul tells us how these gifts work together.

First, ministry is teamwork. There are office holders (i.e., pastors, elders) but they do not "do the work" but rather equip everyone. (Like a player-coach.)

Second, the priority of ministry is building up the body.

This is not selfish but necessary and practical. It takes a healthy church to display the gospel and see long-term fruitfulness.

Third, we build one another up in love (vv. 15-16).

In the original language, vv. 11-16 are one sentence. The final words ("in love") are an emphatic finish; *everything* must be done in love.

*What happens when you, or others, use spiritual gifts from an unloving (or idly loving) place? How does this impact the body?*

## Sermon Focus | What does it mean to “build up in love”?

### 1. Question 1: What does ‘building up in love’ mean?

- a. **Love is local.** (It is *not* abstract.) It involves real people in real time. Virtue signaling is not the biblical vision of love.

Early on in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zosima (a wise monk) is teaching listeners about ‘active love.’ A man says, “The more I love mankind in general, the less I love people ...I become the enemy of people the moment they touch me.”<sup>1</sup>

Love is pressed into a community of people. This is a difficult and high calling.

- b. **Love takes a decided aim.** Love does not seek to keep others comfortable or affirmed. Love is doggedly committed to seeing others become a particular kind of person.

What is this person like? They are like Christ. Mature manhood is to have the stability of Jesus, who understood who he was before God and before man.

What is this person unlike? They are no longer like a vulnerable child tossed to and fro by the deceptions of the world.

Can you think of 1-2 brothers or sisters in Christ for whom you are laboring in prayer, word, and action, that they would become more like Christ?

### 2. Question 2: How do we go about doing it?

- a. **Covenant commitment.** Without commitment, love risks being selfish sentimentality.

First, commitment is expressed through church membership and persevering through life with other Christians (1 Jhn 4:20).

Our love for one another displays whether or not we love God. Our love should bear the image of God’s love, which is furiously committed. The term *covenant* captures the depth and fidelity of God’s commitment and love.

We are going to be with our brothers and sisters in Christ forever. This is not true of everyone in our families, schools, parties, or clubs.

In *Great Expectations*, the protagonist, Pip, falls in love with Estella. But Estella is uninterested until the final page of the book when Pip sees “no shadow of another parting from her.” If you reread the story, you can’t help but say, “Just get together now, you’re going to end up together!”

God knows we end up together (despite our disagreements!).

Second, we need covenant commitment because it bears witness to eternity. Our commitment is not built on comfort or consumerism but on God’s irrevocable calling.

---

<sup>1</sup> In his response, Father Zosima says of active love: “[It] is a harsh and fearful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams thirsts for immediate action, quickly performed, and with everyone watching...it will go as far as the giving even of one’s life, provided it does not take long...*active love is labor and perseverance.*”

Third, we share a unity of the *spirit*—not mood or shared opinions. We commit to other believers in the local church because it's part of God's calling (1 Jhn. 3:16).

Think about how God is perfectly and furiously committed to his covenant with his people. Think about our new life in the spirit. What do these things mean for our ability to love others well? (That is, humbly and actively.)

- b. **Gospel communion.** This is communing through speech and listening. (i.e., “Speaking the truth in love.”)

We are built up by the truth of the Gospel, and we need to commune around it. How?

First, *listening with sympathy and grace*. We need to listen long and carefully to know how to articulate the Gospel.

In modern society we're tutored to not listen. We assume stupidity and a lack of character in others when we disagree with them.

“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.” -David Osberger

Two, *prayerfully asking God what to say*. We must speak the Gospel, not platitudes.

Consider Sam's story of his pastor-mentor, whose encouraging texts contain the truest and most significant message of the Gospel every morning. It anchors him.

What words/messages do you typically send your friends?

Can you commit to someone in the church and speak gospel truths to them?

*Conclusion—*

How does building up each other in love achieve unity?

If you are laboring in your heart and actions and words to build people up to be like Christ, it is very hard to hate them at the same time.

What is one thing that stood out to you in this sermon?

What might Christ be saying to you? What truth can you apply to your daily life?