

## 1. Encouragement is a Primary Work of the Church

- a. Paul summoned the disciples in Ephesus and encouraged them
  - i. “παρακαλεω” – the art of lovingly coming alongside of somebody to strengthen, edify, and give them hope
  - ii. This is the primary word used of Paul’s ministry to ALL the various Christian churches whom he visited
    1. Isn’t it interesting that it’s not “admonish” or “correct” or “straighten out”
    2. It is the word “encourage” and is paired with the word “embrace”
      - a. For even when encouragement means pointing out error or sin, when it is coupled with embrace, such admonishment becomes encouragement
    3. Think about the people whom you have respected, and even loved to follow?
      - a. Weren’t they the ones who were the most encouraging, even as they challenged you to grow?
    4. Think about those by whom the Lord has worked the greatest growth in your lives?
      - a. Were they not the encouragers, those whom you knew were for you, who even when speaking hard words of conviction, were also those full of agonizing care and affection?
  - iii. This is the primary descriptor of his ministry here, as he wrote to the Corinthians during this time:
    1. “I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to make you sad, but to let you know the love that I have especially for you.” (2 Cor 2:4)
    2. And, “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, our heart has been opened wide to you.”
  - iv. Encouragement is always working to build others up, to fill them with hope, with this kind of attitude of love, affection, and mutuality even when correction is being made
- b. Paul also sought to encourage the church in Jerusalem (in Roman Syria)
  - i. 19:21-22 show us Paul’s overall desire and purpose in his “third missionary journey”
    1. Desired to go to Jerusalem, after having visited the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (part of Greece)
      - a. Macedonia is the opposite direction than Syria if you are in Ephesus [MAP]
      - b. This shows that there was a greater purpose than merely getting to Jerusalem (in the Roman province of Syria)
        - i. That purpose is twofold, but Luke only mentions the first in this passage of Acts: to encourage the saints
        - ii. Romans 15:22-29
    2. But, from his letter to the Romans, we can see that he was also collecting financial support for the Jerusalem church, which was under intense persecution, particularly economically
      - a. Having been baptized into Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, they were cast out of the synagogues and ostracized from family and business relationships
      - b. This made them particularly vulnerable to poverty, as people refused to do business with them and family refused to help them
    3. Therefore, he is seeking to “remember the poor” of the Church, and working to find them encouraging support through the sacrifice of their own comforts
  - c. Encouragement Comes With *Many* Words
    - i. The content of encouragement through the words of the gospel
      1. When Paul writes to the churches, he always expounds on the work of God’s grace through Christ first and foremost
      2. He begins with the gospel, then pleads with them to walk in its light
        - a. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live

self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11-14)

- b. “Therefore, we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:4)
  - c. “Walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:2)
  - d. “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, having been rooted and built upon him and being strengthened in faith, just as you were taught, abounding in gratitude.” (Col 2:6-7)
3. This gospel of God’s great mercy and grace towards us, of our being united to Jesus by faith, His righteousness imputed to us so that we are fully complete in Him – This is the means of our sanctification – grace generates godliness
- a. Therefore, encouragement actually edifies us and forms us into the likeness of Christ
- ii. Mothers, maybe you need to be encouraged today grace
1. Because mothering is hard – and you feel like a failure
  2. Because kids can be selfish – and display your failures
  3. Because other moms judge you – and call you a failure
  4. Grace is for failures
    - a. Christ is with you in the messiness and struggles, the confusion and the tears, the frustrations and when you’ve blown it
    - b. God doesn’t love you because you’re a good mother – He loves you because He loves you
    - c. May this day remind you of His grace – that he is near to you with a kind heart, a gentle spirit, and a promise of his never-failing love
- iii. These words were “many”
1. Could my words be described as “many words of encouragement?”

## 2. Embrace is a Primary Attitude of the Church

- a. Luke says that when Paul had called the disciples together he “said farewell”, which is actually the Greek word, “embraced”
  - i. The greeting and the farewell for the Christian, the coming and the going, the arrival and the departure, is the familial embrace
- b. Deeper Affection:
  - i. We have been placed by God into a **family of grace**, where we all are here not based upon our own volition or will or deeds of righteousness, but because of His wondrous grace to us (Titus 3:5-8).
    1. No room for racism, chauvinism, economic superiority, social superiority, etc.
    2. We are free to be honest, open, and transparent with each other regarding our weaknesses
    3. We are free to reprimand each other when we become boastful and self-centered and are acting like we are the Head, not the body
  - ii. We are all the recipients of His grace
    1. Our work with one another is “family work”
    2. Not competitive or comparative or condemning, but encouraging one another *by showing how gracious God has been*
      - a. It is God’s grace which woos our hearts
    3. Look how Paul does this for the Thessalonians (Macedonia)
      - a. “But since we are of the day, we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of dependence and love and as a helmet our hope of salvation. For God did not destine us for wrath, but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, so that whether we are

alert or asleep we will come to life together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as you are, in fact, doing.” (1 Th 5:8-11)

c. Deeper Community

- i. God is bringing all things TOGETHER under Jesus and it starts in the Church’s unity
  1. UNDER CHRIST: Unity of Love and Faithful Obedience to Jesus
  2. He is the HEAD of the Church, the New Race, New Culture, and New Kingdom
- ii. How do we relate to others if the mystery of the Gospel is only understood because of God’s gracious act of regeneration! There is no basis for looking down on others!
  1. You’re not a Child of God because you’re choice
  2. You’re a Child of God because you’re chosen
  3. Humility is the attitude of the Kingdom
- iii. Gospel-Centered Relationships
  1. I have hope for anyone, because God elects, adopts, redeems, and reveals according to His grace alone
    - i. I’m a miracle of grace, why not them?
  2. I coerce no one, for only God can reveal Truth as True to the heart by giving His wisdom and understanding
    - i. No one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws them. There is no need to “convince” or manipulate anyone into doing what you think that they should do
    - ii. You never look on anyone without hope
  3. I have respect for everyone, for I am saved by grace alone, not my wisdom, intelligence, knowledge, or righteousness
    - i. I am not beloved by God because I’m a wiser or more spiritually minded person, a humbler man, a better father, worker, or driver.
    - ii. I AM NOT THE KING!!! But the King loves me so greatly that He sent His Son to die in my place. Oh! What a King! Hallelujah, what a Savior!
- iv. What is it that causes divisions and quarrels among you? Is it not your desire to prove your righteousness which wages war among you?
  1. What do I fear from my brother? Can I show him mercy if I believe that my seat is in the heavens with Christ? Must I control him now with my threats?
  2. The gospel proclaims to our minds the great truth of **God’s work**, the historical facts of God’s “great and glorious works” so that we might gratefully boast of Him as we hear and believe such precious truths, laying aside the unbelief which so easily entangles our feet and trips us up. In this manner, with the gospel holding the center, we behold the urgent need to create a Christian community that is profoundly countercultural.
  3. I mean, what does this grace say about inter-generational relationships? About our racial prejudices? About forgiveness and reconciliation in personal disagreements? About how we think of our brothers and sisters in our highly diverse corners of our heavenly Father’s world?
  4. This truth, that God transforms our hearts and affections by the renewing of our minds through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the guiding principle of the philosophy of ministry at EBF.
    - a. Every ministry, from the cradles of the nursery to the caskets of the funerals, is rooted in the ministry of the Word of God proclaimed and exhibited. Sometimes it’s one-on-one, the commands, exhortations, encouragements, promises of the gospel spoken and applied to the personal situations of a life stretched thin in a world of broken shalom. Other times it’s the broader applications of the gospel truth to small groups, whether Bible studies together or home groups. Finally, it is the Word of God preached to whole Church on Sunday mornings, in the celebrations of Maundy Thursday or Christmas Eve, etc. In each of these ways, our goal is to minister the Word of God in a way that is heard, understood, and believed, so that the Body of Christ is built up into the

knowledge of the eternal Son of God, thus unified in the incorruptible faith, to the maturity befitting the always and ever sons and daughters of the holy God.

5. We believe, with our 1st generation brothers and sisters, that “the gospel is the power of God”. Therefore, we believe it is the gospel, proclaimed and applied by the Holy Spirit, which produces fruit in believers, not the Law, and this is what Paul consistently encouraged with his embrace of the churches
- v. We must labor earnestly, not to derive relational values *from* the gospel, as if the gospel laid a foundation upon which we must build our own spiritual achievement, and still less by focusing on the vanity of sounding spiritual with empty spiritual words but no power, but by precisely and prophetically preaching, proclaiming, encouraging, promising, teaching and living out in our churches the glorious good news that God redeems sinners by grace through His Son Jesus.
- d. We see this immediately in Paul’s inclusion of a diverse group of men to encourage the saints in Jerusalem as an expression of this eclectic union of the Church

### 3. The Church is an Eclectic Union

#### a. Union as One People of God Through Christ Jesus

##### i. There is only one people of God – those in Christ Jesus

1. Galatians 3:26-29

2. 1 Cor 12:12-13

3. “Mutuality is the key to the oneness of the tennis club or the trade union, but not Christians. We are brought together because of Christ’s invitation, and the people he puts us alongside of may well be ‘that very selection of neighbors we have been avoiding all week.’” -Earl Palmer, quoting C.S. Lewis

a. We are not a club whose formation is based upon similar interests! We are the community of Christ who have been divinely bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit in shared salvation in Jesus Christ alone!  
Recognize!

ii. Are my words encouraging others that we are, indeed, one family in Christ Jesus?

##### iii. This One People is Made Up of an Eclectic Diversity of Various Distinctions

1. Revelation 7:9

a. People from every nation, culture, tribe, and language constitute the church of the redeemed of God

2. Eph 2:14-16

a. Peoples from all nations, cultures, language, genders, economics

b. God takes natural enemies and makes them fellow saints.

3. Look how Paul does this by bringing representatives from various churches to bring financial aid to the Judean church

a. Sopater of Berea

i. Sopater is the shortened form of Sosipater, whom Paul mentions in his letter to the Romans as one with him in Greece and is a Jewish kinsman

ii. So, Sopater is Jewish in ethnicity and is a representative of the Berean church in region of Achaia

b. Aristarchus

i. From Thessalonica

ii. Was one of the pair dragged into the theatre in Ephesus in the last chapter, accused of bringing down the entire religious system in “all of Asia” (19:29)

1. Will be shipwrecked with Paul on the way to Rome

2. This man must be a strong, perseverant, patient individual who endures great duress and thus is the one whom Paul wanted to travel with him to Rome with a long and dangerous sea voyage

a. He did not flee persecution (as Demas did, 2 Tim 4:10, who is also mentioned in Caesarea with Aristarchus in Paul’s letter to the Colossians

- b. In fact, his name means “best leader”
      - iii. Aristarchus was a tough Thessalonian, a man of action and loyalty
    - c. Secundus
      - i. Latin name, meaning “second”
      - ii. He was most likely Roman, given that he took a Latin name rather than a Greek or localized name
      - iii. Nothing else is known of Secundus, other than that he was Thessalonian
      - iv. Thus, Aristarchus and Secundus are representatives of the Macedonian churches, both being from Thessalonica
    - d. Gaius of Derbe
      - i. Derbe is in Asia Minor, in the Galatian region, so Gaius is quite far from his hometown at this point
      - ii. So Gaius is a representative from the Galatian churches
    - e. Timothy (of Lystra)
      - i. Much is known and has been said about Timothy when we read Acts 16, so we will just note that he is the representative, with Gaius, of Asia Minor, the Galatian region
      - ii. He is half-Jewish and half-Greek
    - f. Tychicus
      - i. Name means “unexpected” or “it happened”
      - ii. Called “the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (Eph 6:21) and “fellow slave with me in the Lord” (Col. 4:7), who was with Paul in his imprisonment in Caesarea
      - iii. He is a representative of the Asian churches
    - g. Trophimus
      - i. Trophimus is an Ephesian (Acts 21:29)
      - ii. Trophimus is particularly mentioned as a Greek in ethnicity, for it was due to his presence with Paul in Jerusalem that Paul was arrested
        - 1. Acts 21:29 – “for they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that he had brought him into the Temple”
      - iii. Trophimus is a representative of the Asian church, an ethnic Greek
  - 4. This whole motley crew expresses the eclectic nature of God’s Church and its oneness in fully embracing one another and working for the same goal – the glory of Christ and the edification of His people
- b. The Gospel of Jesus enables us to show grace to those of various cultural expressions because we have been shown such great grace
  - i. The gospel frees us up to be personally flexible with cultural differences
    - 1. To extend grace towards those culturally unlike us and for them to open themselves up to extend grace to us.
    - 2. Paul told the Galatians, to become like him in his gospel freedom from being under the law as a means of justifying himself before God because he had become like the Galatians by adapting to their cultural expressions, language, and forms.
  - ii. Gospel ministry itself is culturally flexible.
    - 1. A ministry energized by the gospel is *flexible and adaptable*. It is not tied to any specific culture and custom.
    - 2. Its leaders can come and truly live among the people they are seeking to reach and adopt their ways and love them.
      - a. Compare this with I Cor.9:20-22.
  - iii. One of the marks of a legalistic, works-righteous anti-gospel is that it is inflexible, and makes a “federal case” out of insignificant details.
    - 1. Such a person wants converts to dress and act “just like us.”
    - 2. Paul is a model of someone who (like Christ) truly comes close and enters into the lives of the people he is seeking to reach. He not only got to know them

personally, but he lived with them, ate with them, played with them, talked and walked with them.

3. He got to know their world and lived in it appreciatively even though it was not his world. He entered in as far as he could to their questions and problems and their hopes and fears and sensitivities and adapted his life and speech and language to them without, of course changing the gospel itself.
- iv. Why do we become so inflexible? Because we are not trusting in the sufficiency of God's great grace for us, so we cannot trust Him for others
  1. In other words, when our heart is not deeply convinced that we are fully and completely accepted by God based upon the completed works of Jesus, then we unconsciously assume that it is our spiritual achievements, our performance of laws and rules, both culturally and morally, which we feel are necessary to be secure before God.
  2. Richard Lovelace expresses this very well, when he writes,

“Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons, much less secure than non-Christians, because of the constant bulletins they receive from their Christian environment about the holiness of God and the righteousness they are supposed to have. Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce defensive assertion of their own righteousness and defensive criticism of others. They come naturally to hate other cultural styles and other races in order to bolster their own security and discharge their suppressed anger. They cling desperately to legal, pharisaical righteousness, but envy, jealousy and other branches on the tree of sin grow out of their fundamental insecurity...” (*The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*)

Only when I comprehend the sufficiency and superiority of this grace for me, the messy and needy failure, will I then grant such grace towards others...

When a deep comprehension of God's grace towards us in Christ Jesus is rooted deeply in our hearts, we are much less concerned with our own feelings, how we have been hurt or ignored. Rather, we are way more concerned about others, how their hearts rest in Christ and are depending upon Christ and are exalting Christ as their joy. We are patient as the Spirit works in them; we speak the truth in love *so that Christ is formed* in others; we are humble when we are admonished because our weakness doesn't surprise us and Christ is our righteousness, so we are fully accepted by God even though we are a mess. Therefore, we will vault over all the walls of culture, race, gender, and economic status, the things which so often become dividers and boundaries which we are hesitant to cross, so that others are built up, strengthened, and growing in their knowledge of God and what truly unifies us, i.e. the grace of God in Jesus Christ – the Lamb slain for our sins and the Lion who gathers and protects us all.

I must see Jesus, the only truly perfect one, become sin for me. Though I am wrong, He took the blame. Though I need to be changed, He entered in to me and embraced me, even to the point of death. When I behold that Christ died for ME! For ME! I'm not staring at my brother's sins and struggles, I see my own predominately and I see that MY sins beckoned him near, not pushed Him away, and MY sins were paid for by Him, so that I am declared right by God, not according to my spiritual achievement, but His alone. When I comprehend this, and only then, will I seek to encourage others in the same grace, to embrace others as equal and beloved family in Christ as myself, will I pour my life out for their deeper appreciation and love for Jesus.

BAPTISM – It is our joy to behold the inclusion of a young man, today, who wants to proclaim to you that He is in this family by God's grace, through his dependence upon Jesus alone, through the means ordained by our Lord Jesus, the means of baptism. Include him fully, embrace him completely, and encourage him always in the great grace of God.