

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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### **How People Change – Part IX**

**Pastor Ty Blackburn**

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

**February 28, 2016**

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians. We've been in this passage for a number of weeks. We are continuing our topical series with which we began the year. We've taken a break from our normal expositional work through a book, and we've been working through John for about four years, and we took a break now for these last couple of months. Looking at the subject, 'How People Change', Christian sanctification. How is it that believers grow in grace? How is it that we change? We started off the new year, the first Sunday, in this series, asking the question—*Why don't I change more? Why haven't I changed more this year than last year?*

We noted that sometimes Christians don't change because they haven't really been born again, they are not true believers. They are professing Christians but they are not truly believers. But often, more often, Christians don't change because they are not following God's blueprint for change. They are not letting the word renew their minds. They are not connected to the body. And we've seen that really, as we've gone through the different New Testament passages we've been looking at, that the New Testament places great emphasis upon the fact that every believer needs to be vitally connected to Jesus' Church, and that it is the Church that is a means of changing us. We all are interdependent, and there is this sense in which we are to be, as another one of Paul Tripp's books, Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands. He's got some good titles. We are to be instruments in the redeemer's hands to help other people grow to be like Christ, and realizing that it is a mutual thing. There are also instruments in the redeemer's hands to make us grow together like Christ. Change is a community project.

And so the passage we've been looking at, Ephesians 4, 1-16 particularly, makes that obvious. That the change that Paul is envisioning here, the growth that Paul is envisioning here, and the portrait he is painting for the Ephesians is, that our growth is not just an individualistic, atomistic, personal thing. We should be concerned about our own personal spiritual growth, but it is not merely personal growth that God is concerned about. He is concerned about corporate growth. And we are not talking about numerical growth, just to grow the organization bigger. We are talking about, as we see in this passage, spiritual corporate growth. So that the

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body of believers gathered together in covenant relationship with each other, the local church, the assembly of called out ones who meet together regularly. That there is to be a spiritual growth of the corporate body so that we all grow to look more like Jesus corporately. That we make Him visible, we've seen that that is essentially the thrust of what Paul is saying, and the beautiful picture to which he is pointing, saying, "This is the goal. This ought to be the primary goal in the life of the Christian." We need to have a primary goal of personal sanctification, growing to be like Jesus ourselves, individually. And we need to have, right there with that, the goal of our body of believers looking more like Jesus. Much of our failures in the former, that is to grow individually to be more like Jesus, is because we don't see the connection with the latter. The individual growth is dependent upon the corporate growth. It is organically connected in a way that for Americans particularly, it is hard to see because we think very individualistically, we look out for number one. We grow up in a world system here in the west in general, in America in particular, where that is the way we think. "It is all about me." So Scripture is constantly calling us to expand our frame of reference. We see that in this passage.

We looked last week, I'm going to read it in just a moment, Verses 11-16, but we looked last week at the issue of how the word is so fundamentally important to helping this bigger goal happen. It is the word that makes the Church, builds the Church. It is the word that grows the spiritual body of the Church and makes us look more like Jesus. It is the word that equips us. We had a couple of questions we considered last week. We asked, first of all, what the word does and we saw in the passage that it equips us. Then we looked at, the first question was *What?* The second was *Who?* This was last week, or *Whom?* Through whom the word comes, and we saw the four gifts of the Church, in Verse 11, that we are going to read in a moment—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor/teachers, that these four gifts are basically means by which Jesus is giving His word to the Church. So that in our context, primary focus, or primary application of that verse, is on the shepherd teachers. He has given us shepherd teachers into our lives to feed us His word, so that means the Elders and leaders of our church. We are all to be looking to leadership to help us in feeding us. It ties together with what we looked at from Ezekiel 34, Jesus Himself is the good shepherd, and when He goes to His father, what He does is He commissions under-shepherds to be not the good shepherd, but like the good shepherd, and that is how He works in our lives.

Now, today the question is going to be *How?* How does the word work? How does the word do this? What does the word equip us with to be all that He's called us to

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be? How does the word do it? That is the question we are going to be looking at. Now let's read Verses 11-16.

***Ephesians 4:11-16 ~ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask now that Your Spirit might have Your way in our hearts. That You might send forth Your word, and Your truth, and let them lead us to Your holy hill. And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

### 1) How?

How does the ministry of the word, how does the word equip us? And remember the word 'equip' means to have everything that you need. It was used to talk about fitting a ship for the open seas. And so that when a ship had been carefully prepared, and was now seaworthy, it was equipped. And so that it is the word, and the ministry of the word, that equips us for the journeys of life. An illustration of this may be another illustration that is helpful because individually and corporately we face challenges every day, and it is the word which gives us what we need to face those challenges.

One of my favorite subjects to read about is World War II, and one of the great stories of World War II is what happened in the Battle of Britain. Germany had just run right through Western Europe, and was prepared to come across the English Channel to attack Britain. America was more than a year and a half out of the war before we came in. So there were many in Germany who were ready to

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quit. Well, the Battle of Britain was when Hitler just hurled incredible bombs, and the might of the German Blitzkrieg against England. Bombing continually the cities and all the military bases. Well, all England had was the Royal Air Force, and so they had a pretty good Air Force, and they had *The Hurricane* and *The Spitfire* airplanes, and they had the young men of the RAF, and that was what was standing against Hitler.

After the Battle of Britain was over, after months and months of just relentless attacks, and so many men going up fighting to shoot down bombers, or to fight off the fighter pilots of the Germans, the German Messerschmitt. When the Battle of Britain was over, and they had withstood the storm, Churchill said those famous words—*Never was so much owed by so many to so few*, as those pilots in the RAF. But also, the guys who worked on their planes because often they would go up and fight, they would need to go down and get their plane refitted. Maybe they had taken enemy gunfire and so their mechanics were working to repair the damage, to send them back up.

What Paul is saying is that the word of God equips you for another sortie, is the phrase they use, another mission. The word of God equips in that way, well how does it do it? How does the word really help you and me individually to be what we are supposed to be, and how does it help us corporately for the missions that God has given us? We're going to see that in the passage there are four things that I think the word does. The word of God is a mighty power and it does four things, and in these four things, it is accomplishing that goal of making you and me individually and corporately more like Jesus. The first thing it does is it unifies us. Four verbs we're going to look at.

### A) The Word Unifies Us

The first is *unifies*. The word is '*unifies*', Verse 12. After He says He gave pastor/teachers, remember we said the word pastor is really '*shepherd*', shepherd/teachers. The Greek word literally translated would be '*shepherd, shepherd/teachers*'.

***Ephesians 4:12 ~ for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;***

And then Verse 13:

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### ***Ephesians 4:13 ~ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,...***

Unity governs those two prepositional phrases, ‘*unity of the faith*’, and ‘*unity of the knowledge of the Son of God*’. What he is saying is that the word, what it does is it mightily works in the body to unify us. It is the teaching, and preaching, and the Bible study, and the one-anothering, one-on-one, one-anothering, that unifies us, and we need to be together. If we are going to live in a world that is hostile to us, if we are going to be launching missions daily, as we go about our lives, we are going in enemy territory, we are fighting against the enemy—the world, the flesh, and the devil. We need to be together and the word brings us together. Isolation, spiritual isolation, kills. So many believers suffer because they are separated, they are isolated. Even though they may be physically around other people spiritually, they are not really connecting. 1 Peter 5:8, Peter warns that Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Just think about the way lions try to devour their prey. They try to separate from the herd. As long as you stay together in the herd, it is amazing how there is strength, there is safety in numbers. So they try to isolate one, so isolated from the herd he is easy prey. So it is with our enemy. Satan is like a roaring lion.

So we need to be unified. How do you get unified? You get unified in the truth. You get unified the more you know the truth. Now this is interesting, and it is somewhat anti-intuitive because it seems that it is natural for us to think that doctrine divides. That what we need, you’ve heard this through the years, what we need to do is come together as Christians. We’ve got the songs, you know, *You’re my brother, you’re my sister, take me by the hand. If you belong to Jesus, you belong to me.* And strictly speaking, that is true, but the idea of what people mean by that is, “If you name the name of Jesus, then you belong to me.” Well, wait a minute, what do you mean by the name of Jesus. What is the Jesus that you name? What do you believe about the person of Jesus Christ? Do you believe He is God? Do you believe He is a man? If you don’t, there is no unity. It is only a sham. It is only a veneer over a chasm of divide.

True unity comes as we share in the truth, and the clearer the truth becomes to us, the more it unifies us. Truth truly does unify. Now it divides, because it divides and separates from those that are not true believers. If someone doesn’t believe that Jesus rose from the dead, they can call themselves a Christian, they can call themselves a Baptist, they can call themselves whatever they want to call themselves, but if they don’t believe Jesus rose from the dead, they are not saved.

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If they don't believe that Jesus, when He died on the cross, paid for our sins in a substitutionary way, a penal substitutionary death, if they don't believe that the cross is that, then they are not saved. If they don't believe in a triune God, that God exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If they reject that doctrine, and continue to reject that doctrine, then they are not saved. And so it doesn't matter what label they wear, unity comes in truth, and we see that here because he says, "How do we all attain to unity? It is unity of the faith. We believe the same things," and it is unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. In fact, Paul uses a word for '*knowledge*' here that is one of the stronger words. It pictures deeper knowledge, and so the idea is unity comes as we grow in deeper knowledge of the truth. You don't try to have the barest kind of, lowest common denominator sort of approach to unity. Real unity grows as we really share in the deep things of God.

Now we can have unity with folks that disagree with us on less central things. I've met and prayed for 20 years with a dear brother I went to seminary with who is pastor of Old Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Allen Johnson. He and I disagree on a number of things. He is wrong about several things, and it's just a shame, and he would say the same thing about me. "Ty is wrong about several things." You know, baptism we differ on. We differ on other areas, a little bit of how the church is run, and stuff like that, but he and I believe the same things about the Trinity. We believe the same things about the inerrancy of the word of God. We believe the same things about the person and work of Jesus Christ. We believe the same things about how a person is saved. We both believe that you are saved by grace and grace alone, that you are saved through faith and faith alone, that you are saved in Christ and Christ alone.

Now if you believe those things, the commonality of that draws you together, even as there are always going to be some differences. In fact, there are no two people in this building who agree on everything, but it is not by running away from discussing things that you grow in unity. It is by talking, and this is what we should do, you know when you meet somebody that says they are a Christian, and right off the bat you can tell they are coming from a different tradition than you are. What do you do? I think one of the most powerful things to do is just start talking about Jesus. Let's don't start talking about the things we disagree on. Let's start talking and see if there is agreement on this. You know, on Sunday, you might say, "We were talking about Ephesians 4 and how unity is in the Gospel. It is really in the way of salvation, the fact that that's what really unifies us is that we believe the same things about Jesus. That He is fully God, and fully man, that He left the glory of Heaven and came and died for our sins. Isn't that amazing?" You say something

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like that and you see how they respond. If they don't say, "Amen," and they don't seem interested in that, they want to talk about other stuff, well probably you're not going to find much unity there, and you may not have a real believer.

I mean, we're not trying to cast judgment on people, you are just trying to build, what you are actually doing though, in that is not driving them away. They may think so, but they have just said that they are a follower of Jesus. What you have done is actually reached out to them, like you are trying to hug them. "Let's talk about Jesus, let's talk about the cross. Isn't it amazing that God could take our sins away in the way that He did? That He could remain just, and the justifier of those whose faith is in Jesus." What you are doing is you are reaching out and saying, "Hey, I want to show you Christian love, and have real fellowship with you." But if we refuse to do those things we are just pretending. Sort of a Walt Disney approach to unity, fairy tale stuff. "You say you're a Christian, I say I'm a Christian, let's not talk anymore about anything that we can divide over." No, that is not the way of unity. Paul says the way we are going to attain unity is in growing in the true knowledge, the deep knowledge of the Son of God.

You know, the wonderful New Testament word that is used throughout the New Testament for unity fellowship is the word '*koinonia*'. You know, we want to share fellowship and we've reduced that word, the English word '*fellowship*' down a long way from what it is biblically. I mean, not that we, I use the word this way too sometimes. We mean, fellowship could mean just sitting around talking about the Braves. "I was with my brother and it was neat fellowshiping with him." You know? And nothing wrong with talking about the Braves, maybe not this year, it's not a good idea. Years past, but anyway, I digress. But fellowship really isn't just, I mean, it can start there, we don't have to be people who every time we get together the first thing we talk about is, "Let's talk about the five points of Calvinism," or, "Let's talk about the substitutionary atonement." No, we can talk about life, and we can enjoy one another's company, and we can laugh together.

Yes, Christians, God made the joy of laughter, but if we really want to experience fellowship, what we hope will happen over time, as we are talking, is the conversation will lead us to talk about Jesus. And then as we do that, as we talk about Christ, and we talk about the struggles of life by being transparent, and we say, "You know, could you pray for me in this area. I'm kind of struggling with this," or, "This is something I have a question about. I'm really having difficulty here." It is amazing what happens when we do that. The Spirit of God shows us things like, "Hey, we all have the same struggles," so what does that mean? -

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Koinonia, by the way, comes from a Greek word 'koinos'. It is actually k-o-i-n-o-s, koinos. Koinos is a word which means 'common'. It is an adjective that means common, koinos. We use it in our English word 'coin', c-o-i-n is from koinos in Greek, and it means 'that which is used commonly, common exchange'. Everybody agrees that that silver thing with George Washington on it is worth 25 cents. We have that, we share that, so it is common. Well, koinonia then means, how do you have fellowship? It is what you share in common, it is what you have in common that makes you one. And the more that you understand that you have these things in common, the more that you grow in your love for, and affection for, and your unity with one another. So you start sharing, "You know, I'm struggling in this area," and the other guy says, "Well, I'll be praying for you." And as he thinks about that, and you talk back and forth about the Lord, you are drawn together because you realize that, "He's dealing with the same things that I'm dealing with," or, "He is dealing with what I was dealing with last year, and I was able to help him with what God showed me last year, and I was dealing with something he has dealt with before, and he was able to help me."

But what is happening ultimately is we are learning, I mean we are all sheep who need to be looking at our shepherd. It is kind of like we get together and we say, "This is what is going on in my life," and another sheep says, "You need to follow Jesus." "Oh yeah, I forgot that." And this area we start following Him. And they say, "Hey, I've got a problem in this area," and you say, "Well, you need to do what you just told me. You need to follow Jesus." And it is that that makes us one. So it is the more we get into true, open sharing of our hearts, truth is revealed about our struggles, and the more we look at Christ. And that is the essential thing because we grow in the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God, and it is the word of God that unifies us. So it unifies us and then therefore it makes us more able to look like Jesus, individually and corporately. So that is how the word works. The word works by unifying us. Now the second thing the word does, it not only unifies us, but it develops us.

### B) The Word Develops Us:

I use that word, though the word 'develop' is not actually in the English translation. There are so many different words that connote this idea. First of all, basically five things I want to point out related to the second point, *The Word of God Develops Us*, from Verse 13 to Verse 16. First of all, look at Verse 13.



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***Ephesians 4:13 ~ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man,***

To a mature man, the idea of that word is to a perfect man, to a complete man. So the word of God is not just unifying us, it is completing us, it is maturing us. And look at the next phrase there.

***Ephesians 4:13 ~ ...to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.***

Not just to the measure, to a mature man, but to the measure of the stature. You kind of get the word picture of like a child growing. You know how sometimes you will mark the height on the door, or you'll have some way of charting it? We have that in my grandmother's house. She has several of the grandkids at different stages still on that door, we haven't painted it, because there is history there. What was happening? We are measuring the growth in stature and what he is saying is it is the word that causes you to mature, the word that causes you to grow in stature. But he continues just to pour out this emphasis of the word developing us. Look at Verse 14.

***Ephesians 4:14 ~ As a result, we are no longer to be children,...***

He says the idea is, what the word does, is it makes you, in fact the verb there is being, no longer *being* children. The word makes you stop being children. And the word for 'child' here, 'children', translated 'children' in the New American Standard, really would be translated as the NIV does, 'infants'. Because the word translated 'children' here, comes from two Greek words that basically are a combination of the word 'not' and the word 'word'. So the word child here is the one who cannot say a word. It is a child before he can speak. Now some of that is different. You know, girls can a lot of times talk quicker than boys. Sometimes boys can be almost like three or four years old before they really are doing anything other than grunting. You know? But the idea is, whatever the age, it is below that of speaking. So it is a child that is completely dependent, and he said the word makes you no longer like that. You see, the word is developing you, it matures you, it causes you to grow in the measure of stature, you are no longer children. And fourthly, in Verse 15:

***Ephesians 4:15 ~but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up...***

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The word causes us to grow up. It empowers us to spiritually grow up in the same way that we physically grow up. The word does that. And then in Verse 16, again the same word *growth*, the last phrase: ***...causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*** The word *growth* is there again, so five different times he's using this idea of maturing, growing. So developing, the word develops us. In 1 Peter 2:2 the apostle Peter says much the same thing when he tells the believers there that he's writing to, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby." You're a baby, and how do you grow up from being a baby? You've got to have the milk of the word. Now, the author of Hebrews in Chapter 5 chastises believers who have been believers for a long time, and he says, "You ought to have passed beyond milk and be able to handle meat now." See the image though, it's a child growing up, and he's basically saying, "Hey, you're eight years old and you're still drinking milk only." There would be something wrong, right? That's not right. Spiritually we go from milk to meat, but all the milk and the meat is always the word. It's the word. It's the word. That's what makes us grow.

Now, so you look at your life, you look at it and have a moment where you really look at where things are maybe in your anxiety, your fear, lust, worldly preoccupations. You realize you're not growing like you need to, and it's affecting the way you treat people. You have a problem with anger that's not getting better. Well, how much are you being nourished by the word? If you're not growing, what are you doing? Are you letting yourself be fed? I think this is one of the things that's so sad about, and there's a real irony about modern Christianity in America, is there are so many ways that you can access the word of God now, and yet when you look around us, how different is the church from the world? And I think if we could see what God sees, remember what He said to the church of Laodicea? He said to the church of Laodicea, Jesus does in Revelation, "I see you as naked and blind, and you see yourselves as having no needs." "We're fine. We've got all we need. We're not blind. We're doing good." But the Lord says, "No, I look at you and I see your true spiritual condition, and that's what it is."

How many in the church today are malnourished spiritually? Their lives are wrecked, marriages and families wrecked, because they're trying to live without any spiritual nourishment. And perhaps some of that is because they're either not going to places where they're fed the word, or they're going to churches that they think are feeding them the word, but they really don't. Instead of getting milk and meat, they get cotton candy. It tastes good but it does nothing for you.

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And how does the Lord feel about that? We read about how He feels about that from Ezekiel 34. Shepherds that don't feed, God is very upset with. He will judge. But it's the word that develops us, and so we need to be under the word, in the word. So the word unifies us, the word develops us, it causes us to grow. As we're in the word together, we're growing in unity, we're growing to be more mature individually and corporately, and then thirdly, not only does the word unify, not only does the word develop, but thirdly, the word protects.

### C) The Word Protects:

The word protects us. Here the focus is Verse 14:

***Ephesians 4:14 ~ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;***

Look at the word picture there. We're no longer infants who are tossed and carried about. You know, a little child that's a toddler or whatever, that can't really speak yet, it would be pretty easy to knock him down. If he's out in the wind, a little toddler, if you have a 60 mph wind and you send the toddler across the parking lot, it's not going to be pretty. He'll be blown down, and blown down, and blown down. How easy it is to carry a toddler versus carrying a grown man. Pick him up and just run with him. The idea is that spiritually Paul says God wants you as believers and you as a church to no longer be like a little toddler that can be just knocked over. Just a breath from the enemy and it just falls apart. And what is it that causes them to be knocked over? It's winds of doctrine. It's false doctrine, false teaching, the trickery of men, craftiness and deceitful scheming.

The Lord wants His church to be protected, and protection comes through stability. And the word has a protecting power about it. It protects because it stabilizes. In the same way it causes us to develop, it stabilizes us and strengthens us. I mean, think about how you take your little child to the ocean. When a child is little, everything is new and exciting. I remember us taking Jon and Maggie to the ocean for the first time, and you just wonder what they're thinking. You've got to lather them up with sunscreen from head to toe. They've got their little hat on, little bathing suits, and you walk them to the water, and, "Look, this is going to be fun." And so they're just taken aback by the waves. And think about if you'd just take them out there and just leave them out there. "Have fun!" A wave that maybe would just come up to my knee would drown my child. You'd see him knocked

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over and trying to get up again, and the next wave hits him. He's trying to stay alive and the next wave hits him. That's what the church is like when it's not fed, when it's not strengthened, when it's not protected by the word of God.

The characteristics of infants is they're easily carried about by every wind of doctrine. You see this in America in recent decades in just such a profound way. Think about the various fads that just kind of blow through the church, and how it just catches people up. I remember one of the early fads in my ministry was the Prayer of Jabez. And so this book is written about a biblical passage from Chronicles where Jabez prays, but this guy just takes off on it and acts like this is the secret to the Christian life. "Eureka! I've found it. It's the Prayer of Jabez. If you will just change your prayer life to the Prayer of Jabez, you will change your life. You need to pray like Jabez."

I love some of the responses. The book came out not long after that. I don't remember. Maybe it was actually MacArthur, *The Prayer of Jesus—The Lord's Prayer*. If you want a prayer that is really going to guide you in how to pray, why not do it where Jesus says, "Pray then in this way"? God doesn't say, "Pray then in this way," when Jabez prays. Well, that came and it blew around. I remember hearing people say, "It's changed my life," but then you talk to somebody a year or two later and they're no longer talking about the Prayer of Jabez, so many. *The Shack* was worse than the Prayer of Jabez, just a guy inventing stuff in his own mind about his theology of the Trinity. But he did it in a very clever way. It's a compelling story. I read the book. I felt like I needed to wash my brain with a hose afterwards, because it was a captivating story, and I'm not recommending anybody read that, but it was just lies, and it was craftiness.

I don't know that the person himself intended to deceive. I'm not impugning his motives, but I believe that Satan was working in that process. Satan can work even through believers. Remember what Jesus said to Peter when Peter said to Jesus, "These things shall not happen to You," and Jesus looks at Peter and says, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." But these things come along and it's like the new thing is going to change your life, but then it doesn't, because the only thing that really changes your life is the word of God. We don't need these things. The glory of the Trinity is made plain in the pages of Scripture. More recently, *Jesus Calling*, that if you really want to have a close walk with God, you need to learn how to just listen without the Bible. You need to listen to this other person from what she heard. It's basically using the language that the prophets and apostles used. "This is the word of the Lord." It has that same effect, what she says.

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And that comes, and how is it that they fall for it? How is it that so many people fall for these things? It's because they're babies spiritually. But the word provides stability. The word anchors the soul. The word is a firm ground to stand on. The word protects us. So the word unifies us, the word develops us, the word protects us, so that as we go out into the world on a daily basis, we're becoming more and more one with every true believer, and especially those in our fellowship, and we're developing, we're maturing, and we're growing up in Christ. We're being protected from all of the things that would hurt us. Our spiritual immune system is sound because of the word strengthening and fortifying us. And then fourthly, not only does the word unify, develop, and protect, but lastly the word connects us.

### D) The Word Connects Us:

Now here the emphasis is different than *unify*. Unify was speaking about horizontal connection. The word of God, as we understand it, unifies us. That is, it connects us to other believers. That was what we were talking about with *unifies*. Connects is what he's talking about in Verse 16, really the end of Verse 15 and Verse 16.

***Ephesians 4:15 ~ ...we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

*There are two key phrases—being fitted together and held together.* And now you see the picture here. The head is Christ, and the body, the church, is fitted together and held together to Christ. That's the point. The word is doing that. The word not only unifies us, the word connects us to Jesus. Now, you think about what happens when you're not connected to the head. Neurological conditions that we have in our bodies, that when the brain doesn't communicate to parts of the body, or the parts of the body don't have the ability to hear from the brain, what does that do? It wrecks everything. In a healthy physical body, the brain is connecting to every single thing. The nervous system, the muscles, everything, the brain is directing it.

So what he's saying is that's what we need as Christians. The main thing that you and I need on a daily basis it to be connected to our Head. We need to be loving Jesus, listening to Jesus, and obeying Jesus. That's what all the parts of our bodies do to our head. I tell my hand and my arm to do this, and they do that. And there are problems if I start telling my hand and my arm to do that and they won't do

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that. And that does happen. We need to be the same way with Jesus, and what he's saying is it's the word that does that. He gave pastor-teachers, and He gives us the truth, to speak the truth in love to one another so that we're connected to Christ. And it's the word that does it. How is it? Every passage of Scripture rightly understood, in some way proclaims Christ or points us to Christ. Some passages show us how sinful we are. What does that do? It points you to Jesus. "I need a Savior." Other passages show us the glory of the Savior. We looked at that passage in Ezekiel 34 earlier. The nation of Israel was in such dire straits because the shepherds, the leaders of the people, were not giving the people the word of God, and things were terrible in Israel. What did they need? God uses that moment to tell them that He's going to come. So even that passage points them to Christ, the day that the Messiah will come. And those that had read Ezekiel for those 600 years between when Ezekiel wrote it and when John the Baptist came on the scene, those people who had read it and understood it, and had passed on that understanding, then when people who understood that one day the Lord's going to send that Shepherd, when Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd," they knew exactly what He was talking about. "This is the day. God has come."

All Scripture should point us to Christ, and so as we speak the word to one another, we ought to always be trying to help one another connect to Jesus. That's the answer to every problem. "Abide in the vine and you'll bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing." I love what was said about, I think it was D. L. Moody. I'm not 100% sure if it was D. L. Moody, but I know it's the story of one of the American pastors and preachers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in London and he wanted to hear Charles Spurgeon. Ted read that quote earlier from Charles Spurgeon, that wonderful quote. And he also wanted to hear another famous British preacher, and so he went to hear both of them preach on a Sunday, and he was impressed with both services. He came out of the first service, the man not Spurgeon, and he remembered hearing people talking about just the experience of being there. They were saying, "What an amazing sermon. What an amazing sermon." And then later he went to hear Charles Spurgeon, and after the service he heard people saying, "What an amazing Savior. What an amazing Savior." Our need is to see Christ, and it's the word of God that does that. Nothing does that but the word of God.

So if our biggest need every day is to see Jesus, to be connected to Jesus, what do we need more than anything else every day? We need the word of God. So how can churches gather together and not really hear from the word of God, and not really see how the word of God points them to Jesus? How it must grieve the

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Father and how it must grieve the Son, and how it distorts God's purpose. But it's the word of God that does everything. And so if we believe that and we gather together on Sunday mornings, and we share in the word of God, Sunday morning Bible study and worship, when we gather together in men's Bible study and ladies' Bible studies, and we gather together on Wednesday nights in the various groups that we have, and any other time we gather together, the word of God is being let loose. In all those ways, the Lord is unifying us. He's developing us. You don't expect it to happen overnight either. You don't grow up from being a little toddler to being a grown man just like that. It's day after day, week after week, of caring for that child as a parent, seeing that they eat right, that they do the things they need to do physically, to grow intellectually, and to mature into a man.

So the Christian life together, growing to be like Jesus, is a day by day process made of lots of mundane moments where we gather together and do what God has called us to do. But our trust is in His promise that the word which goes forth from His mouth will not return to Him empty. It will always accomplish the purpose for which He sent it. So sometimes we share the word with another brother or sister and we may not think it really got through. Maybe they asked for help and we feel like it just wasn't there today. Well, don't be discouraged. You don't know what God did. And next time do the same thing. Share the word. Love each other enough to share the word, and trust that you need other people sharing the word with you. We all need to be humbly looking for people to speak the truth to us.

Isn't it amazing how when somebody else tells you something you already know, how powerful that is? We have a men's Bible study on Friday mornings and we have a small-group prayer group afterwards. We're sharing just different things about life, and I will just be amazed at what one of the other brothers said, how much it just helped me. Now, there was nothing just earth shattering new. In fact, if something earth shattering new comes up, watch out. It sounds like *The Shack II* is out, or something like that. But it's amazing how someone else tells you what you already know, that as they look at your life, or maybe they're just sharing what's going on with them, and yet God uses that word to do something in you, and He's building, He's edifying, He's growing you, and the word cannot be stopped. The word is a power that cannot be stopped.

If you think about this, there are really only two things in this world that are going to last—the souls of men and the word of God, and we have the opportunity to be invested in building in one another the souls of men with the thing that will never fade away, the word of God. And God has chosen to build us this way. We might

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like the quick fix. “I’d like to get over all these problems that I have just like that.” All of us would like that, and then we could just coast and rest. But that’s not the way God does it. He says, “I’m not going to let you get over this thing in your lifetime until you really are with My people enough dealing with this issue, and little by little, little by little, I’m going to give you victory. And the word will do its great work. The word can’t be stopped.

I love the story of the Protestant Reformation. Basically, we did our Reformation Celebration this year. Every year we celebrate the Reformation. October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, Martin Luther, the German monk nailed his statement of protest, 95 statements of protest on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany. Now, what had happened before that was Luther had come from being in the dark like almost everybody else in the medieval Roman Catholic Church, to being in the light, and what had changed is Luther had gotten exposed to the word of God.

This last year we did the Reformation Celebration and we started off by starting like a worship service. We gave the experience of a worship service in Latin for about five minutes. I got up with some kind of little robe thing on, and I read the Bible in Latin for five minutes, and then the narrator said, “This is what you would experience all over Europe if you lived in 1505. You’d go to church and you’d understand nothing that was said, but it was somehow magical, and so you were blessed.” Martin Luther started studying the Scriptures in the original language of Hebrew and Greek. He started reading it, poring over it, and the word of God which cannot be stopped caused him to be born again. He came to faith, and he came to see what Jesus Christ had done for him, and he was through with all of the nonsense that was dominant in the Catholic Church, because the darkness of the Catholic Church led him to things like indulgences and all of the horrible practices. Many of them are still part of the Roman Catholic Church, because they rejected the light that God gave through Luther and Calvin, and the Reformers.

So in 1505, you would have found churches like that all over Europe, but Luther, after he got saved, one of the things he set to doing was to translate the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into German, and so the word of God was let loose in Germany. A guy named William Tyndale did the same thing in England. He translated the Bible into English, and the word of God was let loose in England. Then they translated it into French, and into Dutch, and all over Europe people translated the word of God so that the whole climate spiritually of Europe changed. That’s known as the Protestant Reformation, and the motto *After Darkness, Light*.



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All those years of darkness were changed by people finding the word of God, and how did they change cultures? How did they change lives? How did they change whole cities? Not every single person, but by and large many cities saw conversions of untold numbers of people. And the Catholic Church tried to stamp it out. They went to war and tried to kill all of the people that were teaching that, and so hundreds of people were burned at the stake, to stop the word from being let loose. But God's always wanted His word to be let loose.

Luther was asked shortly before his death in 1546, 1517 to 1546, 29 years, how much had changed in those 29 years—he was asked, “How do you explain what God has done? How do you explain the power of the Reformation? How could this have happened? How could most of Germany now be Protestant? And Switzerland, and England, and Scotland, how could this be happening?” Luther said this. He said, “Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all pappas,” that is all people from the Roman Catholic Church who were trying to stop the word. “I opposed indulgences and all pappas (all the trappings of the Roman Catholic Church). I opposed all of them, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's word. Otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept, the word so greatly weakened the papacy, that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The word did it all.”

That's the word of God. The word of God can transform cultures. The word of God can transform lives. The word of God can transform churches. God has willed to make His mighty power, the power of the God of Heaven is made known through this Book, because this Book brings you in contact with His Son. May the Lord help us be people of the word who never tire from seeking Him and His word.

Let's pray together...

*Our Father, we thank You for the glorious salvation that You've given us in Christ, and we thank You for the perfect testimony of Your holy word. We pray that You would help us to be people who grow in faith, and trust that this is truly what we need. This is truly all we need, that we can help one another with this Book, to deal with all the spiritual problems in our lives. This Book will accomplish its purpose. Every word of it will accomplish the purpose for which you sent it. Be glorified in our hearts, Lord, and in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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“How People Change – Part IX”

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