

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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### **How People Change – Part VIII**

**Pastor Ty Blackburn**

**Ephesians 4:11-16**

**February 21, 2016**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians. We are continuing a series of message we began at the new year, a topical series, and a departure from our normal practice of working book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, through God's word. We hope to return to John's Gospel, and John 19, where we left off, before too much longer.

But the series that we are working through now is called 'How People Change', and this is actually our eighth message in the series, 'How People Change – Part VIII', and the sermon text is Ephesians 4:11-16. We have been in this particular passage for several weeks, Ephesians 4, but the focus on the series has been to ask the question 'How People Change'. How is it that Christians are to change day-by-day, more and more into the likeness of Christ? How is it that we grow in holiness? How are we able to put off sin and put on righteousness? Because God's word calls us to that. Why is it that we don't grow more? Why is it that we are still struggling with some of the things that we struggle with?

We've been looking at that over these weeks, and one of the things that we've seen in a number of different passages is that change is a community project. Again, borrowing that chapter title from Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane's book, How People Change. Chapter Five is titled 'Change is a Community Project', and we really see that in a number of places, actually throughout the entire New Testament, with all the '*one another*' and '*encourage one another*', '*build one another up*', '*pray for one another*', '*confess your sins to one another*'. That is, we're growing together. We see this really in a powerful way in our passage that we are looking at in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, and what we are going to see today, in particular, is part of the answer to why people are not changing. Why don't we change? Why do we not see more Christ-likeness in the church of America? It is the absence of the word of God.

We are experiencing what Amos is prophesying in Chapter 8, Verse 11, when he said, the Lord says through him, "I will send a famine upon the land, a famine for the word of God. People will stagger, their lives will be a mess because they won't be able to find the word of God." And evangelicalism in the last decades, there has been a loss of the word of God. Even though we open the Bible, most places open

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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---

the Bible, start with some kind of reading of Scripture, yet there is so little careful study, careful, considerate application of what God is actually saying. There is so little reverence and responsibility in the handling of the word so that the people of God have lost the word in effect. It is like that astonishing story in the Old Testament from 2 Kings about the reign of Josiah, one of the last kings of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, one of the last kings of Israel.

As a young man he encouraged the priests to go in and begin cleaning up the temple because it had gotten out of sorts, the priesthood was suffering. And so they went into the house of God, and as they were cleaning up, they found something that been lost in the house of God. They found the book of the law, and Hilkiah the priest began to read, and he took it to Josiah, and he read in Josiah's presence. He said, "We found this book in the house of God," and he began to read, and as he read, Josiah tore his robe and began to weep. The word of God had been lost in the house of God. Amazing and astonishing, how could that happen? And yet it did and it continues to happen, and it is a thing that ought to break our hearts when we look and see that. You know, so many of the problems that people that we love, that are professing believers, I'm sure you've had the experience of trying to talk with family members, or friends, or acquaintances that you know are believers, and yet their struggles are so deep because they just don't have any knowledge of the word of God.

There is a famine in the land, but it is not just out there that this passage is calling us to look at. God's word always speaks directly to us, and so the question is, how is there still barrenness in my life because the word of God is not let loose as it ought to be in our lives, individually and corporately? Because I think this passage is going to call us to carefully examine our own lives. How is that we are not changing because we have not yet truly, or in enough ways, let the word of God loose among us? As Moses told the people, God gave them manna to show them that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So let's read Ephesians 4:11-16, and as we do, what I'm going to submit to you is that he is basically presenting a picture here that is a glorious picture of what the Church can be, and what the Church is called to do, each local church, each gathering of God's people, called out from the world. Not the building, the people are the Church, and the people of the Church are called to impact their world, one another and the world, by presenting a picture, a living portrait of Jesus Christ. That as we live together, and grow together, and love one another, and serve one another, and work together, and build together, what happens is Jesus Christ becomes visible in our corporate experience and witness.

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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---

This is what he is describing, and what I'm going to suggest to you too today is, and in particular focus this morning is, what makes that happen? What is the engine that makes that reality happen? It is nothing less than the word of God. It is the word of God being proclaimed in the pulpits, in our Bible studies, and in our one-on-one interactions, that drives the engine that forms us into a visible picture of Christ. Now look with me at Verses 11-16 of Ephesians 4.

***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 that You might give us grace, and the power of Your Spirit. Holy Spirit, that You might work in every mind, and every heart, to convict us to lead us to truer and deeper repentance, and truer and deeper trust in the sufficiency of Jesus. We pray in His name, Amen.*

'How People Change', the importance of the word of God. We are going to be looking today at really one important question. We are going to be looking at the question *Who?* or *Whom?* Next time I plan to look at the question *How?* Next time we'll look at how the word does it. Today we are looking at how the word makes us visible pictures of Christ. Today, *Who?* or *Whom?* Through whom the word comes is basically the theme of the message today. Through whom God sends His word, through whom Jesus gives His word to the Church. So the question is *Who?* or *Whom?*

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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---

Now before we launch into that, and we're going to have two points this morning under that major question *Who?* or *Whom?* but I've got preliminary stuff I want to get out of the way here, just to put us in context a little more, to clarify what we are trying to say, and what we see this passage teaching. So before we get to *Who?* and the content of the message, I just want us to look for a minute again, remind ourselves of another picture of what the word does. The most, possibly the most important word in really getting the sense of the overall flow of Ephesians 4:11-16 is the word in Verse 12, '*equipping*', for the equipping of the saints. This is a key word that really just kind of helps you to see the overall structure. What happens in Verse 11, Jesus gives, He gave these gifts, and he lists five different words that I think really are four different gifts. But he gives these gifts for the equipping, and these gifts, these four gifts we're going to see, are really basically gifts through whom the word comes. He basically gives one thing, the word, through these four gifts. And what the word does is it equips, it makes happen everything else that is talked about from Verse 12 to Verse 16. It is what enables us to work together, and to build like we talked about last time. What we are called to do, to work, and to build, it is the word which equips us to work and to build. It is the word which equips us to work and to build so that we grow up, that we attain to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, that we mature. It is the word which enables us, equips us, to work and to build so that we grow up into the fullness of Christ. That is the structure. And so Paul begins this passage with, Verse 11:

***Ephesians 4:11 ~ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,***

And so what I want us to do now, now that we are reminded what the word does, and the word '*equipping*', the idea is it makes you fully functional. That word '*equipping*' means '*to make fully ready, to finish the process of preparing*'. It was a word that was used in secular vernaculars to speak of refitting a ship. A ship comes in from a long journey, and pulls into port, and unloads its stores, and before they go back out, they spend time refitting the ship so that it is ready for another journey, and then it goes back out. So this word, this is what he is saying, "God gave His word through these four gifts so that He could make His people fitted for the journeys of life, that they would be ready for the calling that He has given us, to fulfill their purpose." A ship is refitted so that it can go out and be a seaworthy vessel. We are refitted, continually refitted so that we can grow up and represent Christ. So with that introduction now, back to the main question that we are looking at. Through whom the word comes, that is kind of the overall theme of the message. Through whom the word comes. Now there are two points we are

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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---

going to look at now, and the first point is *Four Specific Gifts*, and I'm going to go ahead and tell you the second one. You can write it down, and remember it is going to be a while before we get there. *Four Specific Gifts, One Overarching Principle*. The second point is *One Overarching Principle*, but we are going to talk now about *Four Specific Gifts*.

### 1) Who? or Whom?

#### A) Four Specific Gifts:

The word comes through these *Four Specific Gifts* in Verse 11. He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. Now there are five words if you count—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Why am I saying '*four gifts*'? Well, in the English they do a pretty good job of helping us with what is there in the original, in the Greek, with the word '*some*'. He gave *some* as apostles, *some* as prophets, *some* as evangelists, and not *some* as pastors, and *some* as teachers. Do you see that? The last '*some*' is for those last two words, and *some* as pastors and teachers, because in the Greek there is an enclitic particle before each one of the words, a conjunction, which in a list delineates one, two, three, four. Now some disagree that maybe there is this kind of jumbling, that he uses '*and*' instead of that, but I think, the structure to me looks obvious when you look at it. It is just like it is reading here, pastor and teacher is one gift. So he says He gave apostles, number one He gave prophets, number two. Number three, He gave evangelists. And number four, He gave pastors/teachers. These are the gifts that He gave.

Now when you think about that, it is really obvious that all of them relate to giving the word of God. The apostles are through whom we receive the New Testament. The prophets, we're going to see in a moment, were those who were enabled by God in the early church to speak the word of God with authority and power in a unique way, in a temporary way. Evangelists are those who today are able to go into new areas and take and proclaim the good news of the Gospel. They take God's word into places where God's word is not. And then pastor/teachers are those who continue to minister the word of God in the new places that the word of God has gone. In fact, I think you can kind of see there is a subset. The first two words here, '*apostles*' and '*prophets*', were temporary and foundational gifts of Jesus Christ, so that He might furnish His church throughout all history. These are temporary and foundational. Let me show you this, you look back at Verse 20 of

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Chapter 2. When you look back at Chapter 2, actually Verse 19 says, Paul is writing to the Ephesians, he says:

***Ephesians 2:19-20 ~ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,***

So that the prophets and apostles are foundational. You only lay a foundation one time, and then the rest of the building goes on for some period of time. I remember when we built our house, now 12 years ago, I remember them coming out and laying out the foundation, and then waiting for the right time to pour the concrete, and then the foundation was there. Then, after the foundation was laid, they began building, and for months, and months, and months continued on, and we didn't think about the foundation anymore. It was now the framing, and then the roofing, and then the walls, and all of the other things that go into a house. So Jesus is building an edifice that stretches across time, the Church. He laid His foundation with the apostles and the prophets, and now he is continuing to build it through the evangelists and the pastor/teachers. This is the picture that we have before us. It is kind of the giving of the word in the first two, and the ministry of the word in the second two gifts. The temporary initial giving of the word in the apostle and the prophet, and the ongoing ministering of the word in the evangelist and the pastor/teacher.

### Apostles

Now, let's talk about these four gifts individually. There are, I said, four specific gifts. First, the apostles. The apostles, when we look at the way the New Testament uses that word, and Paul is consistent with his use here, this is referring to those who were sent out by Jesus Christ, personally and directly. The word 'apostle' comes from the Greek verb 'apostello', which means 'to send from, to send with authority'. And the apostles are the 11, or the 12, once they added back in Mattathias in replacing Judas in Acts 1. They are the 12, plus the apostle Paul, plus James and Jude, and plus a few others that are not named, but are mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. These are men, and this is basically, when you look at the New Testament, and you read through it carefully, the apostle was a one-time office. There are not apostles being raised up today. You hear that, but that is just unbiblical, it is not correct. The apostles were foundational, like we just read in Ephesians 2. You lay a foundation one time. Jesus is the corner stone, and then He

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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---

lays His foundation, another foundation can no man lay than that which is laid. The foundation is laid, it is in the apostles.

The apostles were men who were called and appointed directly by Christ Himself. Now you see this when you look at Galatians. I'm just going to mention this and you can look at it later. We don't have time to go there. Galatians 1, Paul is making the point that he is an apostle and he shows that by sharing with the Galatians that he personally saw the resurrected Christ, and that he personally received a calling to be an apostle from the resurrected Christ. That Jesus met with him over a number of years, personally, and gave him His Gospel. So an apostle is someone who personally saw the resurrected Christ, and was personally called by the risen Christ. And an apostle was someone who, having seen Jesus, having been called by Jesus, is then empowered by Jesus to give Jesus' word without error. This is why we believe the New Testament is inerrant. Of course it proves itself to be inerrant, but we know that God, who cannot lie, is the one speaking to us, and He speaks through His apostles.

You can look at this by looking at John 14. We saw a lot of this when we were reading John 14, 15, and 16. There we were told that Jesus says, "Hey, listen. The Holy Spirit, when He comes, He will bring to remembrance all that I have said to you." He is talking to the 11 at that point, who are the foundation of the foundation of the apostles. And He says, "The Holy Spirit is going to bring to mind everything that you need, and then you are going to make Me known." Chapter 15 and 16 He continues that theme. "When the Spirit comes you will be empowered to be My apostles." In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul commends the Thessalonians for the way they received his apostolic message. "When I preached to you, you did not receive it as the teaching of men, but as it is, the word of God." So the apostles were that temporary gift of the Lord to give us the New Testament. This is why all those other writings aren't biblical. This is how we know that the Gospels, written in 250 A.D., were not the New Testament, along with the fact that those are inconsistent.

You hear all this nonsense about the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, all this, and these are pseudo-gospels. They are pseudonyms. They are using a false name to try to give a hearing to later heretical teachings. Borrow Peter's name, and give you the Gospel of Peter, but Peter's gospel is actually the Gospel of Mark because Mark is the one who wrote it down for him. Paul's Gospel is the Gospel of Luke. Luke was a close associate of Paul, and he got most of his information from Paul, but he also searched out carefully by talking to other

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

---

people. So the apostles, that is the first thing Jesus gives. He loves His Church so much; He favors His Church by giving us the apostles.

Now it is interesting, I love this, I was reading a commentary by a guy, a Scottish theologian, and he pointed this out, he said, “Note he doesn’t say, ‘He gave us the apostolate, or He didn’t give us the apostleship. He gave us apostles, and prophets, He gave us people.’” That the people themselves are gifts, that God gave us the gift of Peter, Simon Peter, to give us some of His word. He gave us the gift of Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the apostle. He is a gift, a love gift of Jesus to you and me. So the apostles, a one-time foundational gift.

### Prophets

Now, prophets, the second of the four specific gifts. He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets. Now when we look at the New Testament carefully, I know when I first read this years ago, as a young man, I thought this was talking about the Old Testament prophets. It is the Old Testament prophets, New Testament apostles. Some people believe that, but that is a minority of folks. I think when you look carefully at the New Testament, and the whole teaching of the New Testament, what you see is that He is really talking about the Church, and that is what He is talking about in Chapter 2 of Ephesians when he said the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

One of the things that shows you he is not talking about Old Testament prophets is, if it was foundation of the apostles and the prophets, wouldn’t it be the foundation of the prophets and the apostles? The Old Testament prophets came first, and he is talking in Ephesians 2, and all of Ephesians actually, about the glory of the Church, this new thing that has now come to be. It is not disconnected from all the old, no, it is a continuation of all that was happening, that God was doing in the old covenant. But it is radically new in that now the Holy Spirit of God dwells in His people, and something dramatic is happening. He is building an edifice, a spiritual people up, Jew and Gentile together, now being built up on the foundation of New Testament apostles, and New Testament prophets. So what are the prophets, when we look more carefully at the New Testament, we see, for instance, if you want to turn to Acts 11:27-28. Verse 27 of Acts 11 says:

***Acts 11:27-30 ~ Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all***



## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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***over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. 29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.***

Now we meet Agabus a little bit later in Chapter 21 when he prophesies that the apostle Paul is going to be arrested and will die, and he is called a prophet there as well. Paul himself is called a prophet in Chapter 13:1, when he is an apostle. Apparently, the prophet was an office in the New Testament, you find this in particularly in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it was a temporary office in the New Testament, that God, that Jesus lovingly gave to His people because they did not yet have the New Testament. If you stop and think about what it was like to have lived in Philippi in 60 A.D., or 55 A.D. Paul came through, he preached, there are Elders and Deacons functioning in the churches there, but we have the Old Testament, and we have the letter Paul sent us, the letter Ted read from earlier, the letter to the Philippians, and we have a scroll of that letter. And we believe it is from God because an apostle gave it to us, and we are to receive it as the Thessalonians did, not as the word of men, but as the word of God.

So we add this to our kin, we have the Old Testament, and we have the letter of the Philippians. It is kind of a skimpy New Testament though for them. But you know we received the first letter of the Corinthians just last year, a copy of it sent over. This was before computer age, you can't just forward an email on. And so from about 40, when the New Testament begins to be written, in the 40s, when Mark and Matthew begin to write, all the way up until maybe 95, the latest of when John writes, you've got the New Testament being formed, but you have it being written in different places, and being sent, one copy of it, to individual churches, or individual people. Then you have them copying it, and spreading it out, and over time they are using the test of 'How do you know if it is God's word?'

Deuteronomy explains it more carefully, how do you test the word of God? Is it consistent with what we've already received? Is it given by a man who has demonstrated to have authority from God? And that is what they were doing, and so the New Testament canon was pretty well formed by 100 A.D. It had all been given, and they were now spreading the copies around because listen, they understood that this was their life. To receive the letter of the Philippians, the Philippians had a treasure that was their life, and they immediately copied it, and spread it around, and so did the Ephesians, the letter that we are reading. They copied it and gave it to other churches. But do you see, while it was happening,

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there was a deficiency, and so what the Lord did was He gave this gift of the prophet. And the prophet, the essential meaning of prophet, Old and New Testament, is *'one who stands in the counsel of God, one who hears from God, and speaks forth the word of God'*. It is not so much foretelling, you've probably heard this before. It is not so much foretelling the future, as it is forth-telling. It involves foretelling often. The main meaning of the word is the prophet is *'the mouthpiece of God'*. He speaks forth the word of God.

So the New Testament prophets then, were people that in that time, when they didn't have the New Testament canon complete, the Lord brought into His counsel, and enabled by His Spirit, as we saw Agabus in Acts 11, by the Spirit he was able to tell them what was going to happen. "There is going to be a famine," by the Spirit he was able to tell them about the apostle Paul in Acts 20. But we find, as we read that the prophets, though they spoke from God, God still maintained a distinction, they didn't speak inerrantly, we find errors in what they said, and they were supposed to test the prophets, that is what 1 Corinthians 14:32 says. The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets, and what happens is the charismatic folks have missed what was going on here, and they want to continue to act like there are prophets today in the way they were then, and there are apostles today like they were then. But they don't understand as you look carefully at the way the New Testament unfolds that it was a temporary office given until the word was completed, until finally we had the whole counsel of God. And now the ministry after that, because the apostles were given and the prophets were given for that period of time to give the foundation, now the building continues to be built by the evangelists and the pastor teachers. So we've looked at apostle and we've looked at prophet, those two temporary foundational gifts. So we continue to look at the four specific gifts, and we come to the third gift, the evangelist.

### Evangelist

He gave some as evangelists. Now, the word *evangelist* is basically a gospeler. The Gospel in English translates εὐαγγέλιον (euaggelion), the same word that we get *evangelist* from. The evangel is the Gospel, and so the evangelist is the one who takes the Gospel and makes it known. He goes and proclaims the good news in new places. We see someone who is called an evangelist in Acts if Philip. Philip was regarded in Acts 21:8 as an evangelist. He went into places where the Gospel had yet not gone and he shared the good news of Jesus Christ. Well, this is apparently a ministry that needed to continue on. The foundation needed to be built once and for all, but the word has to keep going out to new places. It's still going

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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out to new place. There are people that are translating the Bible today into languages that they still don't have Scripture in, and there are men and women who have this gift and this calling who are going into those places to take the Gospel as pioneers of the Christian faith.

I agree with many who say that this is a gift that the Lord has given to the church not just to be out there, but also within each body there will be some who are gifted in evangelism to help the local church to reach out to people, because isn't it amazing as we live in Atlanta today, the difference between Atlanta today and when I was born 51 years ago, almost 52, back then everybody had heard the name of Jesus. But now there are people you can run into who don't know anything about Jesus, because the world has come to Atlanta, and so we have opportunities to take the Gospel to places it hasn't been. But even those who do know the name of Jesus, like people who grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, they know the name of Jesus, but they don't know the Jesus that we know. They know a false Jesus and a false Gospel, and so they need people to go into their world with the good news that is the true Gospel of the true Christ. And so the Lord has given—His love gift to the church is to give some in this particular vein to meet this need, the evangelist.

And then fourthly, he has given that office that's described in the last two words here. *...some as pastors and teachers...* The word *pastor* is such a loaded word, but we know it's the guy that is up front. I remember one of the kids one time asked me years back, "What do you do all week?" From your vantage point I can see that's the conclusion you should make. "He does what he does on Sunday." But the pastor, we have this loaded image of it. It's the guy who maybe went to seminary. He's paid by the church. He does these certain things and he's the leader, and you have all these different mindsets that have crept into the evangelical world today that are not true. He's the CEO. He's the guy that's casting vision.

Well, there's some truth in that, but what is the pastor really supposed to be? He's supposed to be the shepherd who's teaching. That's what the pastor is supposed to be, and I think what we have here is not just the pastor, because like I said, we have this loaded word. The English word *pastor* transliterates a Latin word like *pastorum* or something. I don't know my Latin well enough. So we take the Latin term and we've turned it into an English word. The Greek word that translates into *pastorum* and *pastor* is the word ποιμήν (*poimén*). The word there in the text in

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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Ephesians 4:11,...***and some as pastors*** (ποιμήν, poimén) ***and teachers*** (διδάσκαλος, didaskalos)...

Ποιμήν (poimén), the translation of that if it was a direct translation, and I think it should be, is *shepherds*. That's what the word means. ...*and some as shepherds and teachers*. ...*and some as shepherd teachers*. I think really the intent of Paul is a kind of a hyphenated word here. They didn't have the hyphen in Greek, so he puts it together this way. It's the shepherd-teachers that the Lord has given to the church. And strictly speaking when we look at the rest of the New Testament, I think it becomes clear that what he's saying here is He gave some as a foundational gift to the church as apostles, and it was prophets, and now He began to build, and He keeps building, and the ongoing gift is evangelists and shepherd-teachers. And shepherd-teachers are not just the guy who is up front on Sunday mornings. They are the Elders of the church, because *shepherd* in the New Testament, though the noun only occurs once, the verb occurs a number of times. So the term is used of an office in the church, the office of Elder, which sometimes we might hear as *overseer* or *bishop*.

In fact, we have equation we use in our profile class, the membership class. Elder = Overseer = Shepherd, and we would add to it = Pastor, so that all of the Elders are shepherd-teachers. And so Paul is saying, "Listen, the Lord loved you so much, He loved us so much, He loved each one of us so much that He gave us His word through the apostles and prophets, and He continues to give us His word in an ongoing way through the evangelists and the shepherds who are teaching us."

The reality is that the imagery of shepherding is such a beautiful image in the Old and New Testament. It is the image that God has chosen to describe His relationship with His people. Probably the favorite Psalm of all if you add up how people feel about the Psalms, would be the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. He leads me beside the still waters. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He restores my soul." The Lord is my Shepherd. He's shepherding me. The Psalms are filled with this image.

***Psalm 80:1 ~***

***Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.***

***Psalm 95:6-7 ~***

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*Come, let us bow down and worship,  
Let us kneel before the Lord our God, our Maker.  
7 For He is our God,  
And we are the people, the sheep of His pasture.*

*Psalm 77:20 ~*

*You led Your people like a flock  
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

*Psalm 78:52 ~*

*He brought His people out like a flock,  
He led them like sheep through the desert.*

*Isaiah 40:11 ~*

*He tends his flock like a shepherd;  
He gathers the lambs in His arms,  
And carries them close to His heart.  
He gently leads those that have young.*

So the Lord is a Shepherd-God. We are sheep. When Jesus came onto the scene, the Old Testament pictures more and more the need of a Shepherd. In fact, David is told in 2 Samuel 5:2...

*2 Samuel 5:2 ~ ...And the Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.'"*

"David, you will shepherd My people," and that was all to picture, and David was a man after God's heart, and he was a wonderful shepherd, but he was a flawed shepherd. He was the one who pictured the One who would truly come and be the God-Man who shepherds. We need a man to shepherd us and we need God to shepherd us, and that happened in the Person of Jesus Christ. God became our Shepherd personally. A man was our Shepherd and is our Shepherd. That's why He said, "I am the good shepherd. I know My sheep. My sheep know me. I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep." This is the heart of God. This is what we need. We need shepherds.

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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Now, the wonder of what Jesus does. He comes and He is the Shepherd, and now He mediates His shepherding care first of all through those twelve. He basically gives them the task of shepherding, and then now in the ongoing way through the shepherd-teacher. In fact, turn to 1 Peter 5:1-4. This is one of the passages that shows you that shepherd = overseer = elder, that they're all one office. They are not different offices. They're one. They're just different ways of describing the same office, different aspects of it. Look what the apostle Peter says:

***1 Peter 5:1 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder...***

That's staggering. Peter is an apostle, but he says, "I'm also an elder. God also has made me an elder of the church that I'm in."

***1 Peter 5:1 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,...***

What am I exhorting the elders to do? Shepherd the flock of God.

***1 Peter 5:2 ~ shepherd the flock of God among you,...***

What are elders to do? They're to shepherd. How do you shepherd? Look what he says next:

***1 Peter 5:2 ~ shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight...***

That is the word ἐπισκοπέω (episkopeō) from which we get the word *episcopate*. Episcopal church comes from that. It's translated in the King James as *bishop*, but the word means literally *overseer*. Overseer = shepherd = elder.

***1 Peter 5:2 ~ shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.***

And look what he says next:

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*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

---

***1 Peter 5:4 ~ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.***

The Chief Shepherd shepherds us through under-shepherds. So this is telling us we all need shepherding. I want to read something from Timothy Witmer's book *The Shepherd Leader*. He talks about the different images that God uses for the church and for the people of God. He says the Lord uses the father and child image, and that's powerful how wonderful that is. But he also uses the shepherd image, and one of the beauties of the shepherd image, shepherd and sheep, it connotes something that the father image doesn't. Listen to what he says.

*This is one important distinction between the metaphor of father and that of shepherd. Children grow up and become less dependent on their earthly fathers, though the relationship continues. Sheep, on the other hand, are always completely dependent on their shepherd. They never outgrow their need for the shepherd to care for them, to feed them, to lead them, and to protect them. The shepherd cares for the newborn lambs and is still there when the sheep grow old and weak.*

Sheep need a shepherd. And so God is saying to us that the reason He created sheep was to show us this is the relationship that I want you to have with Me. You and I need to realize that we are so dependent, we are so weak, that we continually need His shepherding and loving care. We can't do anything on our own. We must have Him shepherding us. Jesus shepherds us through His word and through His under-shepherds, and these are His love gifts to us. This is the Shepherd who loved us so much that He lay down His life for us. The elders in the church wherever you are, for us, our elders, but wherever you go in the rest of your life, the leaders in that church are God's love gift to you, if it's a sound biblical church. If it's not, you ought not be there. What a high calling that is and how humbling that is for us, but at the same time, one of the things that we realize as under-shepherds, I'm speaking for all the other elders here at Providence. We have seven men—myself and six other men, two of us paid staff, and the rest of the elders as completely volunteer. We realize that we all need shepherding, and so that we are under the authority of the other elders, and that we must be, and that if we're not, not only are we sheep, but we're stupid sheep. Sheep are stupid, but a sheep that doesn't know he's stupid is even stupider. We need shepherding.

So now what do shepherds do? Shepherds care for the sheep. We just looked at 1 Peter 5:1-4, the shepherd, the flock of God, exercising oversight. I think when he's writing that and he said, "I remember I was a witness of the glory of Christ," I

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---

think in the back of his mind he was thinking about a very poignant moment in his life that we read about in John 21. After Jesus has been resurrected, the first time He's appeared to the disciples, but this is the first time in a little while since He's been with them, and it's the first time that He deals with Peter over the issue of Peter's denial. And in John 21:15-17 He asks Peter three times, "Do you love Me?"

***John 21:15 ~ "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Tend My lambs."***

The word *tend* actually would be translated better *feed*. "Feed My lambs."

***John 21:16 ~ He \*said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Shepherd My sheep."***

That's the word ποιμαίνω (poimainō) from which ποιμήν (poimēn) comes from. "Shepherd My sheep. If you love Me, shepherd them. If you love Me, feed them." And the last one:

***John 21:17 ~ He \*said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus \*said to him, "Tend My sheep."***

"If you love Me, feed them. If you love Me, shepherd them. If you love Me, feed them." So the shepherd elder is called to love Christ by loving His sheep and feeding them, so that the word of God then is given. This is the picture back to Ephesians 4, where the saints are being equipped so that they can work, and to build one another up. And how does it happen? It happens as the word is being ministered by the shepherds. Now, we're going to see it's not just ministry by the shepherds, because look with me at Verse 15. As you go on down he says:

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

The *we* there is not the shepherds. That's everybody. We ought to be speaking the truth in love, and then we are growing up, so that there are others who teach that



## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

---

aren't the official love gifts of the shepherd teachers. All the teaching ministry, though, is under the love gift of the shepherd teachers. Our responsibility as elders is to make sure that all the people who teach regularly in the church are qualified. And when we say to someone, "Hey, listen. You're not qualified to teach right now," we don't say that that often, but it's going to come up. Then they should receive that as Jesus' love gift to them, so that the people who teach the lady's Bible studies, or the men's Bible studies, or the Sunday School classes, these are under the authority of the shepherds, the expression of Jesus' love gifts. If we're doing our job well, then He's mediating His love by giving His truth. What do we need? If He loves us, what is He going to do? He's going to feed us, because man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. What you and I need more than anything is the word of God.

So when the church loses the word, they've lost everything. If it's our life and you don't have it, what do you have? You have nothing. You have death. But the Lord loves His church, and when He raises up and gives these gifts to His people, we're to receive them and to put ourselves under them joyfully. Like I said, the ministry of the shepherd teachers is found in training up good teachers for all the different areas of the church. It's also done in the preaching like this on a Sunday morning, or the teaching of Sunday morning Bible study, or Wednesday night men's Bible study. It's also done, though, in one-on-one ministry like Paul says in Acts 20, when he reminds the Ephesian elders, "Hey, you remember that for a period of three years I was with you and I went not only publicly, but from house to house," that we are to try to have that same kind of one-on-one ministry. It's a little more complicated in this society to spread out as much as we ought, but we're trying as elders to figure out what that looks like, and we're asking you to pray for us so that we could be more effective and more biblical in carrying out the responsibility, because God is saying to us, "If you love Me, shepherd My sheep."

What happens though is the elders basically are those that set the tone and begin—it's kind of like a chemical reaction. I can't really think of a good example. I didn't think this through. A catalyst. You add something to something, and the catalyst creates some after effects and some impact that continues to spread. I think that's the picture here, because I mentioned in Verse 15 we're all speaking the truth in love as we all grow up. We look at other verses like Colossians 3:16 that says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Remember I've mentioned before another example of where the southern y'all would be better. Let the word of Christ dwell in y'all richly, because it's plural. So that it's not about letting the word of Christ dwell in me independently, atomistically, individually. Just let the word of Christ

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

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dwell in me. Now, it should, but that's not what Colossians 3:16 is saying. That's not what Psalm 119:11 is saying, "Hide the word in your heart." But Colossians 3:16 is saying, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you all," and the context makes it clear. "...teaching and admonishing one another." That's how it dwells.

It dwells because you're speaking to one another in love. That's what makes it take up residence among you. So it's as if the elders are given—the word is unchanged. We have a perfect word—Genesis to Revelation, 66 books. Nothing needs to be added. I don't need to tell you I've got a word from the Lord, and if I do and I'm not having my hand on a Bible verse, then you need to really reprimand me. You may need to fire me. You probably do. Maybe I just misspoke though. Give me a chance and ask me what I meant by that.

But the word is finished. It's all we need, and the Spirit has been given to us, and then God gives us the gifts of one another so that we can spur one another on to love and good works. The shepherd teachers feed one-on-one in an overarching way, and then that catalyst starts reactions of the word going person to person, cell to cell, so that the word now is being ministered. Like in the body when oxygen comes into the lungs, the blood carries it, and it carries all the nutrients as it passes through the intestines. It gains the nutrients and it carries those nutrients and the oxygen to each cell in the body. That's what we're called to do.

What a glorious picture it is, And if the word is not being given, then there are no nutrients, and what you have is a wasting away of the true believer. This shows that the most important thing that you can do if you move to another city, the most important thing you can do is find a good Bible-teaching church. That's more important than how close you are to work to commute. That's important, but you can make good use of that time. I don't envy you if you have to commute a long time, and I'm sorry. I don't have to commute that long. So I understand. There are other guys, other elders that can connect with this, because they've got longer commutes, and they'd say the same thing. What's more important is to be close to your church, to be with the people of God, because this is where we're going to receive our nourishment and our life. This is where we're called to come together, to be equipped so that we can work and build, and then there's this maturing, and this growth, and this stability, and we're growing up no longer like infants. We're growing up into the mature man, the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ, and people are seeing Jesus. We're experiencing clear and clearer images of

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

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Jesus through one another and the world is seeing it, and God is glorified. This is the model He has given us.

So there are four specific gifts. Let me just quickly wrap up this last point, one overarching principle, and it is pretty straight forward. One of the things that we see here, He gave His word through four different offices here, four different types of people, and the principle is this. God speaks to people through people. Now, He speaks through His word, but He speaks to people through people. And I say that because we wouldn't have the Bible if God didn't speak this word to us through people. Every book of the Bible, He gave through people. What I'm saying is He could have spoken from Heaven, and somebody could have just dictated. That's what He did with the Ten Commandments, remember? Because He didn't give any of the books of the Bible that way. He brings His prophet into His counsel. He puts His words in his mouth. You can see this in Deuteronomy 18:15. God says to Moses, "Listen, it's good what the people wanted Me to speak through a man, and after you're gone I'm going to raise up for them one like you from among their brothers, and I'm going to put My words in his mouth, and he's going to speak the word to them." God's chosen to speak to people through people.

He did that in the garden. We know He spoke to Adam. We don't see Him speaking to Eve about not eating from the tree. Apparently Adam told her. That's God's way. And so God gave a prophet. He didn't do like the Mormons think. He didn't have an angel come down and just dictate. He worked in the lives of all these 40-some-odd authors of the Old Testament and New Testament. He worked in their lives and He put His word in their hearts, and through the human instrument He gives us His word. And the wonder of it is it's perfect even though you can see a difference in the style of Peter versus Paul, and Amos versus Isaiah. They write differently because they're different people, but God uses people to give us His word, to mediate His word.

I love what Calvin says about the reason—there are several reasons he gives in *The Institutes* for the fact that God speaks through people, but one of the most powerful to me is He did this because it's the greatest way to humble our pride. There are some things in my life that I will never understand unless you tell me. I can read my Bible, and I need to be reading my Bible. I need to be filling my mind with the Bible on my own, yes, but there are some things in my life, blessings I will not have unless you speak to me the word of God. There's something about humbling power of personal interchange like that. Look what Calvin says. He says:

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*Again, this is the best and most useful exercise in humility, when God accustoms us to obey His Word, even though it be preached through men like us, and sometimes be preached by even those who are of lower worth than we. If He spoke from Heaven audibly, it would not be surprising if His sacred oracles were to be reverently received without delay by the ears and minds of all. For who would not dread the presence of His power thundering from Heaven? Who would not be stricken down at the sight of such great majesty? Who would not be confounded at such boundless splendor? But when a puny man risen from the dust speaks in God's Name, at this point we best evidence our true reverence and obedience toward God if we show ourselves teachable toward His minister, although he excels us in nothing.*

That's the wisdom of God, that He works through frail and weak people to help frail and weak people. So we need to humble ourselves. Now, there's a balance. You test everything and hold to that which is good. You're to be a Berean. They made sure that everything Paul was saying was true. They read the Old Testament. "What Paul is saying, is it true?" And God says they were more noble than those in Thessalonica. That's balance, but the wonder of what God is doing is going to be missed by us if we don't have the opportunities to speak the word to one another. The calling we have is such a high calling. We've got to find ways to connect, to put ourselves under the word, under one another, imperfect people helping imperfect people be more like a perfect Savior. May God help us.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

*Father, we thank You for the glory of Your Son, the perfection of His work. We thank You for the majesty of all that You have done in Your plan. We pray that You would help us to humble ourselves and to follow humbly our Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, by following His under-shepherds, and by humbly submitting to every other believer who speaks to us the word of God. We praise You in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

"How People Change – Part VIII"

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