

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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

How People Change – Part VII

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Ephesians 4:11-16

February 14, 2016

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians. We're continuing a series of messages that we've titled 'How People Change', which is a topical series we began at the beginning of the year. This is our seventh message in that series, and we are departing from the book of John, our exposition of the book of John, for just a few months. We intend to get back there before too much longer, where we left off in November, in John 19.

But for the time being, we felt like, as the Elders, that we needed to spend some time really talking about the nature of the Church, and the nature of sanctification, and how those things relate. And so it has been very helpful to me to work through these passages, and this passage in particular is so wonderful, Ephesians 4:1-16. We ask the question, 'How People Change', that is the title of the message, and we asked the question as well—*Why don't we change?* And one of the things that we have seen, as we've looked at various passages, including this one, is that Christian growth and sanctification, that is, that a Christian grows in holiness experientially. That is what sanctification is, the progressive putting off of sin, and the progressive growth in holy living. It is not what saves us, salvation is a once for all act. Justification is something that happens at a moment in time, when a person understands the Gospel, when they repent and believe, and place all of their hope in Jesus Christ, and His finished work. That happens at a moment in time, and forever that person is declared righteous in the sight of God. Nothing can change that, but sanctification begins at that moment. It is an ongoing process. You can think of salvation, in a sense, happens at a point in time, but sanctification begins at that point and moves forward, in that progressive growth in grace.

Well why don't we grow as we ought? Why are we not being transformed? One of the real hindrances to us is our misunderstanding of the Church, and the importance of the Church. And remember when we talk about this, the Church, we need to understand biblically, God doesn't use the word '*Church*' to talk about a building, a physical building. This is not the Church. He doesn't even use it to speak so much of an organization. He uses it to speak of a group of people who have been called out of the world by the grace of God, and separated unto Himself—His holy people. And so that the Church is the collection of those who have been called out, the collection of '*called out ones*'. That is exactly what the

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Greek word, *'ecclesia'*, means. That is the word that we translate *'church'*, in Greek it is *'ecclesia'*. We get the word *'ecclesiastical'* from that, *'Ecclesiastes'* comes from the same Greek word, *'called out'*. So the Church is the assembly of called out ones, and what we see in the New Testament is that one of the key elements, or key ingredients in a growing Christian life, and growth in holiness, is right relationships with the people of God, and growing relationships with the people of God. We've talked about the need for redemptive relationships. That we have relationships with other Christians, that we need to have relationships with other believers in the body that are intentional in the sense that we are trying to help one another grow to be more like Jesus.

And so we come again to this passage which really is, again, showing us that sanctification is in its truest sense *'a community project'*. I borrowed that quote also from that book by Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane, *'Change is a Community Project'*. That is, growth in holiness happens in community. What we are going to see today though is that there is a sense in which change doesn't just happen in community, change happens *as* a community. That what Paul is really talking about in Ephesians 4 kind of explodes the way we think about our own growth. We think so atomistically, so individualistically, especially those of us who were born and raised in the west—Europe, America. We think of ourselves as individuals first, and as part of groups secondarily. The New Testament brings those two realities to perfect balance, that we are not just individuals. We are individuals, yes, and you must make a personal decision to repent and follow Jesus, and to believe upon Him. You can't be saved by what someone else does for you, but at the same time, the one and the many are equally important.

We see that in the Trinity. God exists in community, yet each person is distinct, and yet they are one, three in one. Well, what we see here in this passage is the glory of the Church, that what God wants us to do, if we apply this passage, He wants us to have a mindset, to change our minds, the way we view ourselves, to see that my growth in grace, my calling is not just to grow myself to be more like Jesus, which it is, individually, yes, Romans 8:29. He wants all of us to be conformed to the image of His Son, but this passage is saying He wants the whole body to be conformed to the image of His Son. We have way too low a view of the Church, of how important it is to God, and how important it ought to be to us. Let's read Ephesians 4:1-16. We are going to focus in on Verses 11-16 today.

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Ephesians 4:1-16 ~ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says,

*“WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”*

9 (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) 11 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 supply us with grace, that we might understand wonderful thing from Your word. That You might enlarge our minds, expand our hearts, and grant us more repentance, and truer and deeper faith. That we might become more of what You want us to be. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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I shared a quote, a brief quotation last week from C.S. Lewis in his book, The Screwtape Letters, and I wanted to give you the fuller sense of it today because I remind you that The Screwtape Letters was a book written by Lewis where he is trying to uncover for us the ways of Satan, the strategies, the vices of our enemy. He does it by writing a book where you have two demons corresponding back and forth, though you only get one side of the correspondence. You get the letters from Screwtape to Wormwood. But you can tell in each letter that Screwtape is responding to the younger, the lesser demon, Wormwood, who is his nephew apparently. His Uncle Screwtape is instructing him how he should carry out his business of trying to deceive his patient, human being. So Screwtape is telling him how to keep his patient from God. Now Wormwood has to write him a letter in which he tells him that, “I’ve got bad news,” basically, “my patient became a believer.” And Screwtape is discouraged, of course, but he says, “Well, there is some hope. What you’ve got to do is, to keep him, you don’t want him to be effective as a believer. Now you want to keep him all tied up in not being what he is supposed to be.” He tells him, basically, “One of the things that you’ve got to do is keep him in the dark as it relates to what the nature of the Church is. Because if he really understands what the Church is, and he becomes a part of that, and that is a part of his mindset in his life, he will do us great damage. But you’ve got to keep him in the dark.”

And so, I want to read kind of an extended quotation, and just listen to this. Now again, a demon talking to another demon, so when he says ‘our’, he is talking about the kingdom of darkness. And when he talks about ‘the enemy’, he is talking about our God, and us, okay? With that said, Screwtape says:

My Dear Wormwood,

One of our greatest allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me, I do not mean the Church as we see her, spread out through all time, and space, and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy, but fortunately, it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham, gothic erection (the building) on the new building estate. When he goes inside he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face, bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands. A shabby little book containing corrupt texts of religious lyrics and songs. When he gets to his pew and looks around him, he sees just that selection of his neighbors whom

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he had hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbors...

Now he has just become a believer, and he is coming into the church for the first time, you see? So he now sees that the people at the church are the same kind of people he used to think were a little odd.

You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbors. Make his mind flit to and fro between the expression like the body of Christ and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the enemy's side. No matter, your patient, thanks to our father below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. At his present stage, you see, he has an idea of Christians in his mind, which he supposes to be spiritual, though which in fact is largely pictorial. His mind...

Remember, the new believer, he just got saved.

His mind is full of togas, and sandals, and armor, and bare legs, and the mere fact that the other people in church wear modern clothes is a real, though of course, an unconscious difficulty to him. Never let it come to the surface, never let him ask what he expected them to look like. Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him that peculiar kind of clarity which hell affords.

He is basically saying that the problem that we have is we can't see reality. We cannot see the glory of the Church, but the Church, in the mind of God, in the reality of what God has made, is a glorious thing. And the calling with which we've been called is a magnificent calling. Our problem lies in that we have too low a view of the church, and we have too high a view of ourselves. We have to continue to fight against, I think what has happened in our particular era, recent American history for sure, is to see the Church as a vendor, as a business that delivers a specific set of goods and services. So, "I go to this church because I like the music, or I like the preaching, or I like the children's program, or the youth program." Or, "This other church has a better one. I'm going to go there." That is how so many think of the Church today, or even an organization in which we

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affiliate in sort of a voluntary association. You know like the Lion's Club, or the Rotary Club. We just join it because we kind of like being there, and we can unjoin it whenever we want to. Now the reality is, the church is strictly speaking a voluntary association. You join a church, and you know, you join it freely, but the way the Lord sees it is not in the small way that we tend to see it. Leaving the Church is a much bigger deal than we tend to think it is.

Now, what I want us to see in this passage is that what Paul basically is calling us to is to see that the Church, the believers gathered together in a particular location, as they relate, as they work together, as they minister together, they have an amazing opportunity that they have together that they do not have separately. That opportunity is really shown in Verse 13 of this passage when he says, he talks about in Verse 12 the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until, Verse 13:

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 the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

What he is saying is that the Church, when the Church is being equipped, when the Church is doing its work, when the Church is building one another, is what happens is that Jesus, in His full glory, is seen, is made visible in the relationships of the Church. The closest thing that you and I could experience in our lives, listen to this now, you and I will never experience the transfiguration. There were three men who saw that. It was a one-time event. Now, praise God, at the moment you die, you will see Him. The most glorious sight in the world will be when He comes back, and those who are living see Him, and when we see Him we will become like Him, or we will see Him as He is. And this is the blessed hope that drives us, but not until that day will you see Him. And the closest you will ever come to seeing Him, according to what Paul says here, and in other places in the New Testament we see this as well, the closest experience you will have to seeing Him is in relationship with the body of Christ. That is what he is saying, that is the picture that he is painting. He is saying that as we strive to attain the unity of the faith, and the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God, that as we are striving to attain maturity, so that we are a mature man, as we are striving to attain this maturity, it is the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. What happens is we suddenly are looking like Jesus. So to help us understand what this means, let me give you an example.

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You remember when I mentioned the dinner party several weeks ago? We were talking about the different gifts from Romans 12, the seven gifts that I think are basic motivational gifts that people, Christians have. The idea is you have one basic motivational gift. You may have growing in different areas, we are supposed to grow in all of them, but each Christian has one motivational gift. There you saw prophecy, service, giving, teaching, administration, exhortation, and I already said giving. Anyway, there is another one. Bonus points, you can look that up for yourself. But anyway, maybe it'll come out when I get, I think I've got it actually in my notes here. Yes I do, okay. I don't know which one I left out though, so we'll just have to go back to it in a second. I shared these different gifts, you can see how we are wired differently at a dinner party. If say there was an eighth person who is bringing the dinner to the table, and the seven gifts are seated around the table, and the person bringing the dinner in trips and falls, and the plate falls to the floor, and this beautiful meal is now ruined on the floor. I said the person with the gift of prophecy would be apt to see, "You weren't being very careful." He might not say it bluntly, but that is what he is thinking. The person with the gift of exhortation is, "Hey, it's okay. Listen, that is all right. It happens to everybody." The idea is, "Hey, next time it'll be better." So coming alongside, and walking alongside, that is what the exhortation gift is. Mercy says, "Oh, I'm so sorry," they come right up alongside and ready to just let them cry on their shoulder. "You must really feel terrible. You don't need to feel terrible. It is okay." The gift of teaching says, "You know, it looked to me like you got the weight off-center a little bit. Next time if you will hold the weight more evenly balanced, and the way you do that is like this, two hands." The gift of administration says, "Bob, get a broom. Sally, get a mop. John, if you'll start wiping up the floor." And the gift of service is already on the ground cleaning up the mess. Remember I shared that illustration if you were here.

Now think about this, you are the person who dropped the dish. What you just experienced was seven different aspects of the character of Christ touching you. You see that? So that Jesus is made known through the ministry of the gifts at the point of the need. So that we see that, I mean, who is more merciful than Jesus? He is this high priest who sympathizes with us in our weakness, and so there the gift of mercy is showing us that. The gift of giving, you know, offering to pay for the pizza or whatever, the gift of giving, who is more giving than Jesus? So that is what is happening. So what he is telling us here is that as we all use our gifts, as we all use our gifts what happens is we minister with one another, we are revealing Jesus Christ in a more and more visible, an almost visible way, but a very real way, and a very powerful way.

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So the joy of it is, we get to minister Jesus to each other, we get to be a part of this glorious revelation of Jesus. So it takes whatever your gift is, and lifts up the value infinitely, doesn't it? I mean, you are a part of presenting a picture of Jesus to this person. Any time there is a need, what does that person need? They need Jesus. We always need Jesus, and so the body is continuing to be the hands and feet of Jesus, and to reveal Him. That is the glory of what we are called to do and to be. This is why the body of Christ is so important, and you and I can't be that without the other gifts. We can't be that without one another, not to the same level. I mean, you certainly can, you can certainly minister to people, and you can make a difference, no doubt about it. And you can lead people to Christ, and you can show the Lord's glory, but there is something about the wonder of coming together that God has willed to show His glory in. So that is the main thrust of what we want to see here. There is a sense in which He is calling us, to continue with a thing, I mentioned it last time, we need to change the way we view ourselves. We need to view ourselves rightly. We need to see ourselves differently. We need to see the Church differently.

So today we're really looking at, we need to see ourselves as a part of the Church, and to see the Church differently. I want to share three points this morning, we may get to a fourth, but there are three questions—*Who? What? Why?* and *How?* The fourth is *How?* So three W's and an H. I think what Paul wants Ephesians to see, first of all, is to understand who you are. The *Who?* is who you are. If we are going to see the Church rightly, we have to understand who we are individually, and who the other individuals around us are.

1) Who?

A) A Captive of Jesus Christ:

I think there are two things that answer this first question *Who?* who you are. Who am I as a part of the church? Two sub-points. First of all, *Who am I?* I am the captive of Jesus Christ. When he says:

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says,

***“WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”***

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What he is saying, he is tying this idea of gifts, we saw into the image in Psalm 68 where the glory of God is made known in Jerusalem, and the picture is of a victorious king winning the battle. The idea is that the king wins the battle and he takes captive a host of captives, and leads them in the train of his victory, and then he gives gifts. The idea is the king goes, and he wins a battle, and he takes back prisoners, and plunder. In the truest sense, you and I are the prisoners of Jesus Christ, the plunder of Jesus Christ. If you are a follower of Christ, if you have been saved, Jesus has taken you captive. He is leading you as a captive in the host of captives behind Him. He has delivered you from the domain of darkness, and he has brought you to the Kingdom of His Beloved Son, and you are in His Kingdom, you are His captive. Now if you are His captive, you are not your own, I am not my own. I have been captured by Jesus Christ, I belong to Him.

In ancient society, when a king would win a victory over another kingdom, he would take slave captives. The captives that came home with him would become slaves. And the reality is, the Bible speaks of us that way—we are the slaves of Jesus Christ. We used to be slaves of sin, slaves of Satan, now we are slaves of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. When Paul exhorts us to purity, he says in Verse 19, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God. For you were bought with a price.” Oh, no, I’m sorry, “...whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body. You are not your own, you were bought with a price. You were bought with the ransom price,” another image that he uses, a slave ransomed and purchased. The captive taken captive in the train of the great king, or the slave who has now been bought, both emphasize you belong to Jesus, I belong to Jesus. So that means, if we are going to see who we are, we are not our own, we are to do His will.

B) A Gift to the Church:

The second thing is, this *Who?* Still the first point, second sub-point. *Who are you?* You are not just a captive; you are a gift to the church. It is interesting how he changes the image a little bit. In Verse 7 we saw that each of us have received gifts. Each of us was given according to the measure of Christ’s gifts. We all received a gift, but then in Verse 11, look what he does. You would expect he would say, “He gave some the gift of apostle. He gave some the gift of prophecy. He gave some the gift of evangelism. He gave some the gift of pastor or teacher.”

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But in the Greek what it really says, and what it says pretty well in English too is, “He gave apostles, He gave prophets, He gave evangelists, He gave pastors and teachers.” There’s one verb and all of those are in the form of a word that is the object of the verb. He gave to the church. The idea is He gave to the church, apostles. He gave to the church, prophets. He gave to the church, evangelists. He gave to the church, pastors and teachers. And the idea then is that you and I belong to Jesus Christ, and in the truest sense, we belong to the church. We’re not only not our own and we belong to Jesus, but we’re not our own and we belong to everybody else in the church. Really think about what the means.

Now, he argues basically starting with some of the offices related to foundation of the church. He doesn’t go through all the gifts, but he easily could. Every gift could flow under this, but Paul’s point is going to be, we’re going to see next time, is how you become this is the word of God. And so he emphasizes the four gifts that are related to the giving of the word. But he shows us that in God’s mind, basically what’s happened is Jesus went into the kingdom of darkness and He bound the strongman, he plundered his house, he took you out and me out, He took us out, He brought us behind Him, and then He gave us, like a victorious King coming back giving precious things to those He loves and cares about. He has brought you and me behind Him, and He’s given us to one another. That’s the picture.

So you see, it’s so foreign to think of ourselves as consumers or to think of ourselves as just joining a club. We belong to Christ and to one another. Think of why you give a gift. Why should you give a gift? You give a gift because you want the person that receives the gift to receive the benefit and blessing of the gift. I mean, if you give a gift that’s not going to mean anything to them, that’s pretty stupid. It’s a waste of money, isn’t it? Talking about the cards and stuff for Valentines, card makers have done a lot of really great marketing through the years, right? But you need to make that card count, especially if you have to spend \$4.95 for it, or whatever it is. But you don’t give it just because it’s an obligation and here it is. “What do I have? Oh here, you can have this. It doesn’t write anymore, but it’s cool looking.” It really isn’t cool looking, but I love these pens that have the different colors. Anyway, I use them in my studies. Never mind.

You see how bad it is when you don’t think purposely about your gift, what you’re supposed to give. So the issue is when you give a gift, you’re giving it to be a blessing. You give it so that the recipient of the gift would be blessed. Therefore, you and I are given to other people to benefit them in the body of Christ. That is

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our purpose. Our purpose is to glorify God by serving and blessing His people. He loved the church so much that He gave you to me and to everybody else in this body. He loved us so much that He gave us to one another. That will change the way we see each other, and change the way you see yourself, doesn't it? And this is thinking rightly.

It's like Lewis points out, we do tend to think about things that irritate us. We look around us and we don't see the reality of who really is next to us. We think in a worldly fashion because we're surrounded by people every day, the world that thinks in a worldly fashion. Then we have to strive continually to put on the mind of Christ. How does Jesus see this group of people? We're surrounded by mighty instruments in His hand that are great sources of blessing, that are precious gifts that He picked out. When you give a really good gift, it's exactly what that person needs, and isn't it wonderful when you know you nailed it with that gift? "Wow, I'm so grateful that it worked out. That's what she wanted." Each one of us, does Jesus ever not nail it? Of course He does, every time. So we need to see ourselves. Who am I? I am the captive of Jesus Christ and I am His love gift to the church, therefore, I'm called to do not my own will, but to be a blessing and a benefit to everyone around me.

2) What Are You Called to Do?

Now, I said, "Who are you?" The second question is: What? What are you called to do? I've talked about it a little bit, saying blessing, but let's work that out a little more, because Verse 12 helps us do that. What are you called to do? I think we see this when we realize that Verse 12 says that the gifts that give us the word are there for the equipping of the saints, that is, the making ready of the saints to do what they're supposed to do, and that really comes after equipping of the saints. What is it that we're supposed to be about doing? There are two things. What are you called to do? There are two things in Verse 12 that basically are the two main things in the entire passage that we're called to do. After we understand who we are, I'm a captive of Jesus, I am His gift to other believers in my church, then what am I called to do? You're called to work and you're called to build. That's what we're called to do. He has two phrases there.

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

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Those two are parallel. In fact, it would be better if they had the same preposition, because really they ought to, because they have the same preposition in Greek. You could translate it, "...for the equipping of the saints to the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;" I think that would show the intent a little better. So the gifts that God gave us for the word are equipping us to do what we're called to do, which is the work of service and the building up of the body of Christ—to work and to build.

We're all called to work. We're called to labor. This is an important word in the passage. It's repeated in Verse 16 when he kind of comes back to some of these same themes, when he says:

Ephesians 4:16 ~ ...being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part,...

The proper working is really the individual working of each part. So the idea is that what we've got to be doing is we all have to be doing our job. We're all called to work. He's given us unique gifts and we're all called to be at it. If we're going to be a picture of Jesus Christ to other believers and to the world, we've got to be doing our work. He gives the other phrase *work of service* you see in Verse 12. ***...for the work of service...*** Some of the translations say *for the work of ministry*. The word translated *service* is the word *διακονία* (*diakonia*). The word *deacon* comes from that same root. The etymology of it is a little unclear. There are two basic theories of etymology. The word definitely means service. A servant is the *diakonos*. It could be a household servant. It could be one who waits tables, but the word *service* the etymology of it, either it comes from a word which means to hurry, or it comes from a compound of words which means *through the dust*. Either way, I think both of those fit the way the word is used in the New Testament. It pictures one who is definitely hurrying to the task. He's working. He's a servant. He's not idle. And it also pictures humble service. So we're called to work. We're called to do our work. We're called to do what we see to do, to do it, to do it humbly, to do it actively, to do it continually, to do it thankfully, but we have something to give even if no one else notices. Who are we working for? We're working for Jesus. So what are we called to do? We're called to work.

We're also called to build. Our work is building up the body of Christ. We're working and we're building. In fact, building up is another word that's repeated twice. Just as work is repeated twice in the passage, you have *building up* in Verse 12: ***... to the building up of the body of Christ;*** It's also in Verse 16. He says:

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Ephesians 4:16 ~ according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

We're to picture ourselves as gathering together, and we are building. And the image is we're building a spiritual building. In fact, I think it really is beautiful how Paul uses this theme that he had used earlier. Look with me back at Ephesians 2. In Verse 20, there's a really neat connection between Ephesians 2:20-22 and Ephesians 4:11-16. He said:

Ephesians 2:19 ~ 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, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,...

Do you see that? And he says:

Ephesians 2:22 ~ in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

We together are a dwelling of God in the Spirit, that when we work together and serve one another, what we're supposed to be doing is building one another up so that we become more and more a dwelling place for God. I love this, because John makes this point in 1 John 4. That's where he says, "No man has seen God at any time, but when we love one another, His love is perfected in us." The idea of what he's getting at in 1 John 4 by saying, "No man has seen God at any time," is that nobody does see God visibly, but the closest you can come to it is when believers love one another, and then you almost see Him. And that's what Paul is talking about here, that when we use our gifts, if your gift is service, every time you use your gift, you see a need, and you move to meet it, you are building the temple of God, the true temple. You're building His body. And when the person with the gift of mercy uses the gift of mercy, and when the person with the gift of giving uses the gift of giving, and when the person with the gift of administration uses the gift of administration, we are building, and Jesus is going to be made known in a powerful way.

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Now, that brings us back to the third question: Why? We're called to work and we're called to build. That's the question of: What? And then: Who? We're the captive of Christ and the gift. What? We're called to work and we're called to build. Why?

3) Why?

I've already kind of laid this out, but I want to come back to it in Verse 13 and unpack it a little bit more. Why is it that we do what we're supposed to be doing? Why do we work? Why do we build? Verse 13:

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 the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

That word *until we all attain*, the word *attain* is a strong verb which really pictures arriving. It pictures meeting a goal, having a goal and getting there. It's an emphatic word that has a preposition on the front of it that really intensifies the meaning. So it pictures a goal in sight that we are striving to meet. It's kind of like an Olympian training for the Olympics, of a football team training in the off season to get ready for a football season so that they can win the championship. And the eye is on the prize, so we're building, Verse 12, we're working and we're building. Knowing who we are, we're working and we're building. Verse 13, because we have our eye on the prize, and the prize is given in those next three clauses. ***...until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,...*** to three things, basically. We're trying to reach three things—unity, maturity, and fullness. You see he says we're all trying to attain the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God. What we are trying to do is become one. When we work, when we build, we're not doing it to be appreciated, to have our own little celebration of who we are, for people to just affirm us. What we're trying to do is we're trying to become one with other believers. ***...the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,...*** We're trying to be united in what we believe, and we're trying to be united in the knowledge of Jesus. And unity comes really through serving one another and celebrating Jesus Christ together. This unity that we're seeking is the unity that Jesus prayed for on the night before He was crucified, "...that they may be One even as we are one," that we would become more and more, as individual people, more and more of one mind and one heart just like the song we sang earlier. We are the body of Christ. With one desire, one heart, one voice, we want to praise Jesus.

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There's something about us learning to serve and work together that creates this sense of increased oneness in Jesus that you don't get if you're not serving one another. If you're not having to work through problems together, you're not going to come to the same measure of understanding of who Jesus is and the glory of Christ, and you're certainly not going to manifest that glory in the same way if you're not working on those kinds of relationships. So the eye is on unity and the eye is on maturity. He's saying that what we want to have is we want to become a mature man. He's not speaking individually. He's saying we should have as our goal that the body of Christ that we're associated with, that we belong to, would be more like Jesus next year than it is today, that when people come around it, they would sense more of Jesus in our midst. When they see us ministering to one another, they would see more of Christ.

This third thing, maturity and fullness, is almost saying the same thing again. First, *...until we all attain to the unity of the faith,...* secondly, *...to a mature man,...* and thirdly, we see that preposition *to* again, *...to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*. Basically the word *stature* means adulthood, to the measure of adulthood. So he's basically saying *maturity* again. He's saying *to a mature man* and he kind of emphasizes it again to being just like Jesus was in the fullness of His glory. What we want is to be just like Jesus when He was manifesting His glory, and we see this corporately, not individually. This is what's so hard for me, elusive for me. We just tend to think of ourselves individually even though we know we're called to love one another. We really need to have a corporate vision. And when this happens, then the fullness of Christ is revealed. Of His fullness we've all received in grace upon grace, this is what the church is called to be.

Now, think about this, what this really looks like in practice. I'm amazed at how, I think in many ways God has really blessed our church. I would say that you are doing very well. I marvel at how when there is a need in the body, the body activates and operates. When I first came to be a pastor 22 and a half years ago, I had a very different view of the ministry, and church, and everything, of course, but I felt like I had to do everything. In the church as it was then, maybe some of that was them. A lot of it was me, but I felt like if anything was going to happen, I had to just make it happen. If there was a need over here, I've got to do it or I've got to talk to somebody about doing it, and that's the way it felt for me, and I think it's probably the way it felt for our leaders too. And what I've seen happen since then is I've kind of felt like 12 or 13 years ago when the church went through the change it went through, the Lord made me understand that the how of building the

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churches in Verse 11, which we're going to talk about next time. We're not going to talk about *how* today. That's next time, but the *how* is essentially how do you get equipped? How do you help people build? How do you help people work together so that we start becoming one, and becoming a mature man? How do you do it? Essentially you give them the word. You give them the word. You give the word, and you give the word, and you give the word, and it happens.

I've told this to some of the Elders and different folks at different times. I'll talk to people sometimes about their church situation, other pastors, and I'll constantly be thanking God for what He's doing at Providence. Just like I said, things that happen, there are needs, needs will get met all the time, and I have no idea what's happening. In fact, I feel like sometimes I'm the least likely person to know. This isn't good for me, but this is just reality. I don't know what all is happening. Somebody will ask where to find something, and I'll say, "Don't ask me. I don't know." I'm on a need to know basis, and apparently I don't need to know much. My key still works. That's all I know.

But there's a sense in which he's set it out right here. Nobody told me this in seminary the way that it happened, but the Lord in the process of working through our lives as a body showed me more, and more, and more, that what you need to do is focus on preaching the word and teaching the word, and God will take care of the rest, and this is essentially what he's saying here, that the way that the church becomes fitted for this amazing task of becoming the glory the Christ, of being moments of transfiguration, glimpses of glory, the way that it happens is the leaders have got to teach the word and keep preaching and teaching the word, and then what will happen is the saints will be equipped to do this.

I praise God because that's what's happened. I know we have a long way to go. There's no question about that. We all have a long way to go, but we have come so far, and I stand in awe of God, in awe of the power of His word. It's not having this well thought-out plan and making everything happen. It's just trusting the means of grace and the wisdom of God. Preach the word and pray. Encourage folks to love one another. Now, we've got to work on some things, and we feel like this is one of the reasons we're preaching on this right now is we know we need to facilitate and shepherd a little better, and facilitate relationships better. There are some things that we need to do to help people get more connected so that every joint is connected, but that basically as I look at this, I think we're on track, and I just stand amazed, because I feel like I'm more surprised than anybody else, but more thankful.

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God is so good, and I think we ought to give Him praise that He has done what He's doing. Say there's a situation of bereavement, or there's an illness, a painful loss in someone's life, there's this gaping wound in a heart, or maybe it's an ongoing illness. It's a need where the person is dealing with anxiety. They're dealing with prolonged pain, and then the body comes around. And when folks are using their gifts, there are folks with the gift of mercy that are just reaching out and expressing concern. There are folks with the gift of service, who are bringing meals and ministering. There are folks with the gift of giving, who are doing the same, or providing for financial needs. There are folks with the gift of teaching, and we all try to learn to have all the gifts, but whose heart is beating with trying to point them to the truth of the Gospel that will encourage them and lift them up. There are folks with the gift of prophecy, who aren't saying, "What did you do wrong? Who sinned, you or your mother?" No, that's not what the gift of prophecy does. We're filled with the Spirit, and the gift of prophecy has a sense in which it speaks the word of God also. It stands in God's counsel and offers God's counsel. That's what a prophet does. The gift of exhortation reaches out and hugs the person and then helps them to go forward, and in that, Jesus Christ is made known, and those people are built up, and then the people around them, family members, friends, they get a glimpse of what Jesus Christ really is. They see the character of Jesus. They see the heart of Jesus, and they see the hands of Jesus. And that is an awesome reality. That is an awesome privilege that we get to be a part of.

So it ought to lift our understanding when we understand who we really are. It isn't what we tend to think and what we see with our eyes. We are people who have been taken from the kingdom of darkness. We belong to Jesus Christ and we've been given to His precious people. And when we start working and building, understanding what the goal is to manifest the glory of Christ, there is nothing that can stop us. That's why he says *terrible as an army as banners*. That's why Jesus said to Peter when Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I say to you, you shall be called Peter, and upon this rock (the rock of the Gospel that Peter had just declared), I will build My church. I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Nothing can stop the church that is built on the word of God and growing in love for the Savior, moving in ministry to one another. There is no force in the universe that can stand against it, because it is nothing less than the power of God. It's exciting to be a part of that. That's the calling that we have. May God help us to live in a manner worthy of that calling.

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Let's pray together...

Our Father, we praise You for the glory of Your plan, the perfection, the amazing, surprising beauty of what You're doing in the world, that You are making all things to come under the Headship of Christ, and that You are doing it today through bands of people like us that You have brought out of darkness, and brought into Your marvelous light. We who were the weak things of the world, the foolish things of the world, You've made Your own, and now You're showing the glory of Your Son through us. We ask You, Lord, to continue Your work. Remove every obstacle in our hearts. Remove the unbelief. Remove the stubbornness, the selfishness. Fill us with love. Fill us with wonder. Fill us with wisdom. Fill us with urgency. Fill us with joy and gratitude. For what a privilege it is to be the child of God. We pray for those that are here today who are not children of God, that You would grant them repentance and faith that today they might turn from darkness to light, from being the enemy of God, to being the blessed, precious child of the living God. We thank You that Jesus' blood is more than able to deliver everyone who looks to Him, and we pray this in His Name, Amen.

"How People Change – Part VII"

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