

I'm Not Ok; You're Not Ok

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians. We're going to take a detour this morning from our study of James. We will be in James 5, Lord willing in a couple of weeks. I'm trying to learn from what we preach on, right? And today I want to mention too, a special guest that is here, a dear brother in Christ, Sybrand de Swardt, is in town already and is with us and glad that he has made it here from South Africa. As Jess mentioned, he'll be sharing on Saturday night at the mission grounds coffee house about the ministry in South Africa and what we are going to be doing on our mission trip over there, and also just about what's going on in Lynwood Baptist Church, ACBC Africa and SMTI. So we look forward to hearing from our brother share and then he'll be preaching next Sunday morning again, Lord willing. Then also I want to just mention that he and I are going to be traveling together tomorrow to attend our first D. Min. seminar, Doctor of Ministry seminar at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. We are both seeking a Doctor of Ministry in biblical counseling and I'm very grateful to him. He's really the one who helped nudge me into doing it. We were talking about it and the fact that he signed up and you got ahead of me, you got signed up early and so anyway, I'm grateful. We have been working really hard and we're looking forward to a good week this week. So pray for us and pray for him especially. The flight over he had a little bit of pain in his leg. They are worried there might be a blood clot or something so he's going to the doctor in the morning, but just lift him up to the Lord as you think about him and we look forward to worshipping together next Sunday and hearing the word.

This morning I said we were stepping away from James, I wanted to share something that has been on my heart related to some things I've been studying and the title of the message, really Ephesians 4 is a point of departure. We're going to be moving around in the Scriptures. It's really more of a theological, systematic theological sermon in the sense of looking at a lot of different passages and what they say and how they speak to the question. The title of the message this morning is "I'm Not Ok; You're Not Ok." I chose that. Advisedly, there was a book in the late sixties that was a bestseller, "I'm okay, you're okay," and it was at that time a popular psychological theory that was being, a psychiatric theory that was being advocated. Not to get into the details or the weeds of that, but essentially the idea was that understanding our past and how we got to where we are, it's really okay that we are like we are. Not that everything in that book is wrong but the essential premise is, and that is that, yeah, we in Christ especially, it's the sense that we are okay and we are all okay in one sense, yes, because we are washed under the blood of Christ but it's really we are going to be okay. We're not okay now and so we are

really not okay and I'm not okay and you're not okay. And the Christian life really is understanding that; that once you are born again, you have a new heart, you've been changed, you're set on the course of heaven, eternity future has invaded the present and you now have a share in the life of God in the present but you still have a sin nature. You still have a daily battle not just with indwelling sin but with the world and with the devil.

So there is no sense, there is no time for complacency in the Christian life. Sort of the I'm okay, you're okay, really shouldn't be the way we think about life. We're in a war zone spiritually. That's the picture the New Testament gives. We are at war not only from without but within. The enemy is within and so we need to be diligent and so the issue, then, is I'm not okay, you're not okay, we need to help one another. That's kind of the tagline, I guess, and what I want to put before you is something that we talked about before but it's becoming clearer in my own heart and I want to share with you some things that I think will help us to be more motivated in this area, and that is that as we look at the New Testament, we're challenged as sinners who see things wrongly and who think atomistically, and then particularly challenged as Westerners because we think even more individualistically than folks from Eastern cultures do. We are challenged to understand the New Testament's emphasis on "one anothering," our corporate identity in Christ, how much we need each other, how much I need you and how much you need me, how much each of us need one another. We can sort of agree with it theoretically but it's really hard to get it into the fabric of our lives and God wants it to get into the fabric of our lives but this is the way he wills to change us. We have a tendency to, we get sleepy spiritually and we kind of think I'm okay, you're okay and we just think in terms of our daily life and what we want to have happen and, yeah, we're thinking about spiritual things but we're not thinking with urgency of like if we were really at war here and tanks are going to be coming through, we would be acting differently, right, if there was a real physical war going. Well, there really is a real spiritual war going and so part of what we have to do is keep reminding each other to be alert. Be vigilant. Be sober. Your adversary the devil is like a roaring lion. He wants to devour you.

So what we want to talk about is the tendency that we, I think even in a church like ours where we have embraced some biblical teachings regarding what sanctification is. Sanctification basically the word means the progressive growth in holiness that happens, that should happen in the life of a true believer. Sanctify means to be made holy and so it's a progressive being made holy in your life; that the Spirit begins at conversion, at regeneration, and continues throughout your life and we are to be actively involved in that. We're not passive. We understand that. We have a sound theology of progressive sanctification. We understand this biblically. I mean, by and large as a church I think we have a pretty good understanding of this. Different places, we are all at different places, of course, but we also have a pretty good understanding of the doctrine of the church and that we are supposed to help one another, that the church really is a corporate entity and that we are inter-dependent, that God gives us spiritual gifts and he makes us one and we are supposed to help one another, and yet why is it that if we know those things, why do we find it so difficult to really do them? Why is it so hard for us to really leave behind a mindset of kind of like a Lone Ranger Christianity? We would not articulate that we live that way but we act as if we believe that when we don't really open up our hearts, we

don't really get involved in other people's lives. We see people around us that are in need and we are not thinking vigilantly and we are not thinking soberly, we are not understanding how much we need to be involved in each other's lives so we don't ask the question, "Hey, how are you doing?" And we don't go past the initial, "Fine," to say, "No, how are you really doing? I want to understand what's going on with you." Or we don't open up when we are on the other side of it and share with someone who does ask us.

One of the things that I think that is a particular challenge for us and that we have seen some and elders have talked about this a little bit, is that as you start to understand things like the doctrines of biblical counseling, we're going to be studying that this week, as I said at Southern, the D. Min. program, well, one of the things you learn is that you need to keep growing and becoming more skilled in the way that you handle the word so that you can help people. We need to do what 2 Timothy 2:15 says, "to study to show ourselves approved, a workman who need not be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." That is, that we learn how to skillfully handle the word in relationship to one another, and we all need to be growing in that ability because we are all called to speak the word to each other. But we can sometimes overestimate the importance of that or underestimate the power of the Spirit in a believer because what can happen is we can have a leave it to the expert mentality, and I want to caution you from that; that when you see someone in need and you see they are hurting, that you think, "Well, they need a counselor. I need to talk to an elder or one of the ladies that's working through the counseling program." I mean, you might eventually but the first thing that God would have you do is move toward them in love to bless them and to help them. Do you see? Don't leave it to the experts, go and engage and then later if you need to, and expert is not even a good term. You understand what I'm saying. It's kind of the way people think nowadays. There are no experts. The reality is the people that are most trained in biblical counseling, most skillful, will tell you there are so many times they have no idea what to do when they are talking to a counselee and they're praying, "Lord, what is it that I do with this person right now?" We do have the expert, the Holy Spirit is the expert. He knows what's going on in the heart of that person and if you are a believer, you have the Holy Spirit.

So I want to talk with you today about the title "I'm Not Ok; You're Not Ok," so we need to help one another, really arguing for why we should see that this is our daily duty to help one another and to be helped by others in our sanctification, and I want to organize our thoughts, let me read the first passage. This is like I said, it's a point of departure. We're going to look at three points but let's read Ephesians 4:7 through 16 and as we read, I want you to note he's going to talk about giving the spiritual gifts that he gives us and then he's going to talk about the body, and what you're going to see in this, this is a passage to meditate on because he is describing sanctification completely corporately. What I mean is, he's describing a local church, the church as a whole growing up to look more like Jesus, not individually. Now obviously, the individuals are because each one is growing in grace and doing their part, but he's describing a corporate growth. This is the kind of thing we have to pray through, meditate on, because it's so outside the box for us, especially as Americans.

Ephesians 4:7 to 16,

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 thank you for the preciousness of your word. We thank you that it instructs us, it confronts us, it reproves us, it shows us how to change. We pray that your word by your Spirit might do just that. May you accomplish your purpose in each heart for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, the three points I want us to consider our thoughts around, the first point is the way God works, and what I'm going to argue in this first point is that when we understand the way God himself works, we understand that we were made to be the image of God. The first chapter of the Bible, we are created in the image of God, that is to replicate and to reflect his glory, to be like him. The image and likeness of God. When we understand the way God works, it ought to have clear application to how we should work and let's think about this, the way God works.

The Bible makes clear that God is a Trinity, that he is a Triune being, that God is three persons in one essence. There are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all equally God. They are equal in power and glory and yet they are distinct persons interrelating in a communion of love. Co-inhering, yes. Completely in one another so that to see Jesus is to see the Father, but yet distinct persons. Well, when we look at the Scriptures, what we see is that God, and remember I preached on this about four Sundays ago on Father's Day, I preached a message "The Glory of the Family." If you weren't here, I would watch that because I'm not going to go into all that we talked about that day obviously, but just to remind you of one key point. We talked about the fact that we noted

that when the Lord gave, when he created man, when he decided in the moments of creation as he is creating things, we have a dialogue that happened suddenly in the creation. To this point, there has been no dialogue, there has just been God saying, "Let there be light," God says, and there is not a dialogue or response. But at the moment he creates man, he says, "Let Us make man in Our image." There is a dialogue in the Godhead. "Let Us make man in Our image." So God makes man in the image of his Triune self. I think the reason that happens at that moment is to show us that that's part of the reason he's creating man is to create a relational being that is like him in relating to one another, and so that the true picture of the Trinity, the only real picture of the Trinity is man and woman and a child, a family, three persons yet one entity. It's not exactly the same, it's a representation but it's the best one we have and it's the one God gave.

Now, so he created man to reflect his glory. That's why he created man so that he could shine his glory throughout the universe through man on the planet earth. That being said, if we look at how God works, it helps us understand something about how we should work because one of the things we see as we look at the doctrine of the Trinity and we look at how the Scriptures paint for us this picture of our great and glorious God, is that we see what's called the economy of the Trinity worked out in the Scripture with clarity. The economy of the Trinity. It's from two Greek words. Actually the word "economy" comes from the word "oikos nomos." Oikos means house. Nomos means law. So like the law of the house, the rule of the house. So economy, that's where the word comes from. The economy within the Trinity is the way that the family, in a sense, I mean, it's Father, Son, Holy Spirit, it's not exactly a family the way our family is made to image that but in the Trinity we see that there is this clear pattern of relationship and here's the economy of the Trinity the way that theologians often break it down. The Father administers; that is, he calls the shots, as it were. He directs. The Son accomplishes and the Spirit applies. And we see this in creation and redemption. The Father administers and directs, the Son accomplishes and the Spirit applies.

Let me just show you this and I'm going to give you some verses you can look at a little bit later. I'm going to summarize them quickly for the sake of time but I encourage you to look at them and work through them to see how this economy of the Trinity works out in creation. Think about a couple of verses. First, John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being." So the Word, the second person of the Trinity, through him all things were created, right? And nothing was created apart from him. Colossians 1:15 to 17, it's says essentially the same thing, "For he is the firstborn," speaking of Jesus, he is "the firstborn of all creation. For through him all things were created that have been created, things invisible and visible, things in the heavenlies and things on the earth. All things were created through him and for him." So everything is created through the Son.

Then you go back to Genesis 1 and how does God create? Then God said. The Father says the Son, the Word that goes forth from the Father. It's through the Word that the Father creates. So the Son is the instrument of creation. We see this in Psalm 33:6, through the word of the Lord, the heavens were made. But the Spirit is also involved. The

Spirit is there in Genesis 1:2. We are told that the Lord created the heavens and the earth. The Spirit was hovering over the waters. He's down there kind of on the ground surface is the picture, and when we see the way that the Scripture continues to unfold, that's his role, it's to apply. In fact, it's also Psalm 33:6 I mentioned a moment ago, that through the word of the Lord the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their hosts. The breath of his mouth, ruach, the Hebrew word for breath is also the word for Spirit. By the Spirit of his mouth, all the celestial bodies.

So the Son and the Spirit are involved going forth from the Father in creation. There is this harmonious, interdependent, complementary roles. They work together in beautiful harmony. The same with salvation, with redemption. The Father directs. God is the one who sends his Son into the world. When we preached through John a few years ago, one of the things that we pointed out was how many times Jesus said the word "sent." "I am the one, I have been sent by the Father. He who sent me." And that's a key concept. He said, "I'm doing the will of him who sent me. I'm doing his will. I've been sent by the Father."

So Jesus comes to accomplish the will of the Father. You see this pictured in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son," it's the Lord loving and planning salvation and he sends his Son, he gives his Son as an offering. His Son does the great work of salvation. He comes and lives a perfect life, tempted in every way yet without sin, fulfilling the law positively in absolute perfection. Then he gives himself as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world as a sacrifice for all who would ever believe and he pays for the sins of everyone who would ever believe, every sin past, present and future laid upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And he does take them away and he's able to say, "It is finished." So from the cross he cries out, "It is finished. The debt is paid." He dies to fulfill the penalty of sin, experiencing the penalty of sin in our place, and then he is raised on the third day to prove that he was righteous in all of his ways and death could not hold him, and he becomes a Savior of everyone who believes in him, delivering them from the domain of darkness.

Now he comes and accomplishes but one of the things that we saw also in John is how he makes clear that it's good for him to go away. Remember John 14 to 16, the three chapters from the Upper Room discourse. Jesus says in John 14:12 and following, "It's good for you that I go away." They are really distressed. "You're distressed because I'm leaving. No, don't be troubled. It's good for you that I'm going away because if I go, I will send another comforter to you and when he comes, he will lead you into all truth." And he says things like, "And you're going to do greater things than I have done." Now how can that be? How can that be? Well, the things that you and I do are on the other side of Calvary, the things that Jesus did on this side of Calvary that he was ministering in, were before all of his great accomplishment of redemption so that people were not delivered the same way from the domain of darkness as they are afterwards. They were saved but after the cross and resurrection, they are plucked away from Satan so that when you and I preach the Gospel, someone is saved in a dramatic way that we can't anticipate. This is what he was talking about too in Matthew 11 when he says that John the Baptist was the greatest, there was no one greater than John the Baptist. Remember that? The greatest

man that has ever lived yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. There is a new order that has happened through Christ. He has inaugurated it but now that the Spirit has come, we are a part of that. We are realizing that. So the Spirit comes and the Spirit applies everything that Jesus has done. Jesus had said this, to be saved he said to Nicodemus, you must be born again. You have to be born again. How are you born again? You are born of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit regenerates you. If you are not regenerated, you are not of God.

So, "I have accomplished and now the Spirit is going to apply this to you." He regenerates and then it's the Spirit who sanctifies you. It's the Spirit who fills you. It's the Spirit who fights within you against the flesh. It's the Spirit who will have you, as we saw in James 4. He lusts to the point of jealousy after your affection, the Holy Spirit, so that this perfect complementary outworking of God's plan where each person is contributing certain aspects of this perfect plan and they each delight in the other's work. That's what you see, the Father, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased. Look at my Son. Everything, look at how wonderful my Son is." The Son continues and says, "The works that I'm doing aren't my works, they are the works of the Father. Look at the Father." Then the Son is saying, "Listen, it's good that I go away. The Spirit is coming. Man, when you have the Spirit, you're going to have everything that you need. And when the Spirit comes, what does he do? He will testify of me." All he can do is talk about Jesus. So you have this beautiful complementary, interdependent working in the very being of God, in the nature of God, this is what we see.

Now, progressive sanctification. What happens when a person becomes a believer? Well, they are born of the Spirit. The Spirit comes to dwell inside of you and now you have a war going on. There was really no war before, it was just tyranny. Now there is a war because you are now alive to the things of God and you still have this old man. This is what it's talking about in Galatians 5:16, but I say walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. You don't walk in the Spirit, you will fulfill the desires of the flesh so walk in the Spirit.

The Spirit has come in, now we are to cooperate with God. In progressive sanctification, we grow in holiness not by passivity. Let go and let God is not in the Bible as a doctrine. In fact, just to show you, turn a couple of pages over to Philippians 2:12-13. Philippians right after Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 12. This is what sanctification is like. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Paul says, "Listen, what you've got to do is work out what God has worked into you. You have to labor and work this out." It's not something light. It's not I'm okay, you're okay, it's work it out with fear and trembling. This is serious business, work it out. Well, you've got to do it all in your own strength. No, it might feel like it sometimes but it's not and you must understand this because verse 13, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." As you labor to do what you know to do like get in the word, pray, as you labor to make yourself talk to that person that you don't want to talk to because they look like they have a need and you don't feel like you have anything to give, and this is the time for me to leave it to the

experts. No, move toward them. Make yourself do that and that sometimes feels like, man, you're laboring to make yourself do it. Yes, that's working out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Now how do you do that? As you do it, you pray. You should be praying. "Lord, I don't want to do this. I don't think I have anything to give. I don't know why anybody would want to talk to me right now but you have shown me this person and apparently you want me to talk to them." Do you see how the Lord is working on our hearts even as we're saying stuff like that, isn't it, because we are kind of complaining to him at first. "Really? I don't think so. This is not a good idea. You've made a mistake." It's kind of like we're saying, we're like Moses, "Here am I, send Aaron. Somebody else." Well, the Lord has put you in a situation and you see the need and what do you do? "Lord, I don't know why you are sending me but if you're sending me, you've got to give me strength. Help me. Help me know what to say." So you just start moving and you're thinking, trying to think of some Scripture or whatever. You're praying and you just make yourself go forward confident that he's the one that's working in you, that he will give you the power.

Now turn over a couple more pages to the next book, Colossians 1, and I want to show you this principle again. This is basically, progressive sanctification, growing in holiness, has been described as a synergism, a divine human synergism. Synergism comes from two Greek words, soon together or with, and ergo, to work, ergon, to work. So it means to work together. Synergism. So sanctification is a divine and human synergism. We work with God and you are called to work with God. It's not like, and the reality is you work but you're only working with the energy that he gives you so that at the end you can say from him and through him and to him are all things by his grace. I am what I am by the grace of God and nothing more. Yes, but you've still got to work at it and trusting in the grace. Do you see? That's the mystery.

Now look at this in Colossians 1. Paul gives us a window into his own human divine synergism in the carrying out of his ministry. Look at verse 28, "We proclaim Him," that is Christ, "admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." Here's our model for ministry: we are lifting up Christ and we are teaching and admonishing every person to make them complete. Look at verse 29, "For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." I am laboring for this. I am agonizing for this. I am straining for this according to his power which mightily works within me so that you see that when you are actually doing it and you get it done, you know that he has done it, and there really is that prayerful dependence and awe at what God has enabled you to do. That's what a divine human synergism is. That's sanctification.

Now think with me for a moment. So you have to work with God in your sanctification. Yes. You are also made to reflect God, the image of God, to be like God, right? So think about how illogical this is: when you work with God in your sanctification, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all working in your life together, the Father, I mean the Spirit has helped you know the Father so you are calling out to the Father. You are praying to the Father, the Father is hearing your request, he is granting your request. The

Son is your Savior. The Spirit is saying look at Jesus, look at Jesus. The Spirit is empowering you. They are all three doing their roles and he says, "Now you work on your sanctification to reflect me but you do it atomistically. You do it as an individual. You don't need other people like we need each other." Do you see? It's ridiculous that we would think that we can be a Lone Ranger Christian. You need other believers because God made you to need other believers. He made it so that before sin it wasn't good for man to be alone. That's what he says in Genesis 2:18. It's not good for man to be alone and now that's part of making the man, male complete by male and female, yes, but it's also making man complete by making him in a relationship.

So when we engage in the synergism of sanctification with God, we should expect that we've got to do it together. It's got to be a community effort and that's reality. It's actually like this is the one place where the phrase, "It takes a village," might actually apply. It takes a church to grow up a believer. It takes a community of people who love Jesus together to help grow up a believer and the reality is it takes all of us to help all of us grow up. And this is what we should expect.

Now if this were true, if what I'm telling you, it should be true just like I said, just logically it makes so much sense but then look at the New Testament and how the New Testament presents it. One of the keywords in the New Testament is the word "one another." It's one Greek word translated with our two English words, one another. More than 50 times you have statements that we are to minister to one another in different ways. We read one in Ephesians just a moment ago but let me just share a few with you. I said more than 50 times just to give you a sampling, we are called to admonish one another, Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16. Admonish means to set the thinking straight of another person; to set their mind right. We are called to encourage one another. You see the "one another" is back and forth. I admonish you, you admonish me. It's not one way. Encouraging the same way, one another. 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13. To serve one another, Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10. To build one another up, Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11. To accept one another, Romans 15:7. To love one another over and over again but for an example, Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:7, 11 and 12. To be devoted to one another in brotherly love, Romans 12:10. We could go on and on and on. Confess your sins to one another, James 5 we're going to see. It shows that if we are going to grow up, if we are going to have right-thinking, we have to be "one anothering." I need you telling me what I don't see. It's amazing. Isn't it amazing how somebody else can tell you what you already know and it makes all the difference in the world when they say it? They say it and you're like, "That's exactly what I needed to hear. I know this. Why wasn't I already dealing with it?" Because God made you to need somebody else to say it to you.

Another example, so the "one another" is something you would expect if God wanted us to see sanctification as a synergistic, humanly synergistic work too where we work together on our sanctification. We all get together and it's kind of like, I can't think of a better example than this, forgive me, like scrapbooking. That's a terrible example. You go down into a cul-de-sac and you find you're in a cul-de-sac and it's hard to be cool. You just turn around and go out, you know? I've never scrapbooked so don't worry about me.

But you know, you get together. I've seen that happen. Back years ago it was a big thing for a while and everybody had the cool stuff and I remember hearing the ladies talk about it and some of them have these things they can do and others have these things and so you help each other. Everybody scrapbooks better because they got together to scrapbook. Let's move on from that.

The point is we need the help other people have and they need the help that we have for them. Another example would be what we saw in Ephesians 4, the metaphor of the body of Christ. When you come to Jesus you are a part of the body. Now think about that. 1 Corinthians 12. Romans 12. Ephesians 4. 1 Peter 4 talks about spiritual gifts and we use them and the idea is the Lord, he puts the body together in such a way, this is particularly 1 Corinthians 12 teaching, he gives different gifts to different people so that we will need one another. You know, if you're the foot, you can't say you have no use of the hand, or the eye can't say that it doesn't need the foot. The eye needs the foot, the foot needs the finger, the finger needs the eye, they need the nose, all the way around. God has done it so that it would be like that, exactly what we would expect from a Triune God, isn't it? That he would create us so that we would learn to appreciate and delight in one another in our various gifts, and how can we possibly grow up if we're not letting the different parts of the body affect us and we are not affecting them?

Another important way you see it is when you look through the Scriptures more carefully and you see how often the word "you, y-o-u" is actually plural and not singular. Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." A wonderful verse. I learned that verse when I was in high school and what a wonderful verse, but when I learned it in high school and for years, I thought it meant let the word of Christ dwell in me individually richly. Well, the Bible says that in other places, it doesn't say that in Colossians 3:16. That's not at all what it's talking about in Colossians 3:16. It's talking about that maybe in various Psalms, other places, "Meditate on the word. Let it dwell in you. Fill your mind with the things of God." Yes. Yes. Yes. But Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you all." We have this covered by in Southern by y'all. The beauty and wisdom of the South, I guess, in that one area. We've got a lot of problems but that's one thing we've figured out. You need to know the difference between "you" singular and "you" plural. Other places have done that too with different things.

Anyway, so, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. How? Teaching and admonishing one another. How does the word of Christ dwell among you? How does it get richly dwelling among you where it's inhabiting your corporate relationships, your lives corporately? It's your learning to speak and you're learning to admonish one another. You are giving teaching, you are giving admonishing, you are receiving teaching, you are receiving admonishing. So this is exactly what we would expect. If we look at the way God works, we would expect that he would work just that way in our lives and that's exactly what we see.

So the way God works. That was our first point, the second point is the way God speaks. When we look at the Bible and step back from it and look at the way God speaks, it is something really quite surprising when we carefully think about it. The first thing to see

is the glory of God is that he, himself, is a speaking God. He could be a God like the deistic god, the made-up God of deism that is so busy he doesn't talk. He's off doing other things. But no, the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. He speaks through nature continually revealing himself, Psalm 1, Romans 1:18 and following. He makes himself known through what he has made and day to day that message is going out, who God is, his eternal power, his majesty is being seen through what he has made. It is being heard, as it were, through what is made.

But he not only speaks through nature and his creation, he speaks through his spoken word or his written word. That's special revelation. Hebrews 1:1 to 3, God spoke formerly, "after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son." God's way is to speak and he spoke in many diverse ways through the prophets and he gave them different kinds of ministries and different kinds of visions, but he gave us the word through the prophets. He spoke through the prophets. In fact, when you read Deuteronomy 18:15 to 22, Moses is explaining at the end of his ministry that he actually says something, I think it's verse 17, he says that, "You remember when God spoke to you from heaven at Sinai and you were terrified and you said, 'Please, Moses, don't let him speak to us anymore from heaven.' And God was pleased with what you said. He agreed with you, as it were, and so he will keep appointing prophets to speak to you. He will speak his word to you through human voices in the same way he has done through me, Moses."

God willed to speak through us. Now that in itself, I mean, it's one of those things you have to step back and think he could have done it differently. I mean, maybe at times you wish that he would speak directly from heaven. I thought that, you know, when you really don't know what to do, "God, if you would just speak from heaven and I knew it was you. Do this." Right? We would know it was him, but he has chosen not to do that. It would have been much worse for us had he done it that way. He has chosen to speak through us and here, again, the image of God. He makes man in his image to reflect his glory, well, he's a God who speaks and his word is powerful. This is who God is. His word is so powerful that he speaks and the creation happens. His word is so powerful that he upholds all things by the word of his power. His word always accomplishes his purpose. It always does what he sends it to do, Isaiah 55:8 and 9.

So his word is like that. He makes you and me in his image and he says, "They're like me. They're like the Triune God. They are like us in that they are going to speak." And this amazing noble thing. It's something that makes us different than any other animal. They have their different little ways of communicating but they don't have language like we do. They can't converse like we can. We are made to speak like God does and it is the most amazing thing that he takes the word of God that has the power, when he said, "Let there be light and there was light," he created light out of darkness with his spoken word. Think about that.

How does he save? 2 Corinthians 4:6 says that when we are saved, he uses the same image. He says, "God who spoke light out of darkness has shone in your hearts." He's saying that when a person is saved, they go from being in the dark, God speaks savingly

light and life. There was no life, there was no light, suddenly there is light. Something powerful has happened. This is why the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The most miraculous thing in the world is when a sinner bound in sin, dead to God, is made alive. That's the most amazing thing that can ever happen that we can see in this world.

Now consider this: the God of heaven has asked you to be his mouthpiece for his life-changing word. He puts his words in your mouth and he makes you speak and your voice going into someone else's ear is the means, it's all of his doing, yes, but it's the means he uses to bring light and life. That's astounding. Now, he's made us to be people who speak all the time like that, to speak after him. That's in itself amazing.

Now there's another aspect to it, though. He's made us to need to hear his word through other people. This is why he gave the prophets. "Yeah, I'm going to do it this way. I'm going to raise up a prophet, I'm going to put my words in his mouth." That's essentially what a prophet is, they are the mouthpiece of God. They speak forth the word of God. They say, "Thus saith the Lord." We have the written record of the prophets in the Old Testament and the written record of the apostles in the New, this is the word of God. But we received it through human beings. We received it through distinct human personalities. You know how we talked about as we work through James, I've commented at times how he just hits me, his personality, as you read James you just see his personality coming through. I mean, he's kind of like one of those direct, smack you right between the eyes kind of persons. "I'm a doing this in love." Pow! And you're like, "I wouldn't do it that way." Well, I'm not James. That's James but God works through James and he gives you that, but Paul is different than James. Paul writes differently than James and yet the word that Paul writes and the word that James writes that are in this book are perfect, the perfect word of God. Perfectly the word of God and perfectly the word of man at the same time.

So if God spoke, he chose to give his revelation through human personalities like that. Isaiah is different than Amos. He chose to do that to let us, to grant to us amazing nobility. We don't deserve it. We are dust of the earth but we are made to be like him. So now think about that. You, then, have the opportunity to speak the word to someone else. What an incredible opportunity that is. But the other side of it is, you need other people to speak his word to you because after he gives us the Canon, he doesn't just tell, this isn't the instruction of the church, "Everybody make a copy and everybody go home and read on your own." Are you supposed to read on your own? Yes, right? You should be memorizing the word, meditating on the word, yes, yes, yes. You should read the Bible together one and two people, families, yes, yes, all of that. But he ordains the office of preaching and teaching throughout church history. He makes people gather together in a room like this and listen to one guy get up and preach. Now a lot of churches are getting away from this because they don't understand that God has made it this way. To us, in a sense, it's like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, the foolishness of preaching. It's really, in a sense, foolishness that people would gather and sit and listen to one guy talk every week. Sometimes as I say it, it makes no sense to me as I'm saying it, but it's the way God has chosen.

So do you want to hear the word of God or not? He's chosen to give it to us this way and it's wonderful and glorious and he's chosen to not only give it to us just in the preaching or the teaching or the leaders, he has made every one of us, he has called us to disciple one another. We are to be speaking the truth in love one to each other all the time. You are to be admonishing one another. You are to be admonishing me and the other elders. You are to be teaching me and the other elders. And there are some things that you will say that I will hear and understand that I will not understand if you don't say it. That's just a fact.

One of the ways that I see this at times is when I will get through preaching a sermon occasionally and somebody will then in the joy of talking about what the Lord did in their heart and the message, they will tell me something I said. "You know, when you said this." It happens quite regularly that they will say something and as I hear it, I think, "I didn't say what you think I said." Now sometimes I think and I say, "Well, I know I did not say what you think I said," because there is an error or something. No, usually that's not the case at all. Usually they are saying something that was really relevant and I think to myself, "I wish I had said what you said," and I think how good of God for you to speak that, Lord, through that person to me right now. How good of the Lord. I mean, just for someone to say back to you what you said, it's got a power. It's amazing. The Lord made it this way because he made us to speak and he made us to listen.

One of my favorite quotes is John Calvin marveling on this in "The Institutes of the Christian Religion." He says this about the way God has chosen to use the means of speaking through other people, preaching, teaching, one anothering, sharing with one another. He said, "If God spoke from heaven 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, who would not be stricken down at the sight of such great majesty, who would not be confounded at such boundless splendor?" But he continues, "But when a puny man risen from the dust stands up to speak in God's name, at this point we best evidence our piety and obedience toward God if we show ourselves teachable toward his minister, although he excels us in nothing." Isn't that amazing? God creates in us humility by making us need to listen to other believers tell us what we sometimes already know. He humbles us and he makes us love the other person more. "Thank you for telling me that. I'm so glad you're my friend." This is his way. This is the glory of what he's done so the way he speaks, now if he's going to speak that way, that means if I don't speak to someone when they are in need, I may be withholding from them what they desperately need and that they will not get otherwise, and that if you don't speak to me, I won't get what God wants to give me through you. We have to get busy speaking to one another and listening to one another.

Now I'm going to quickly summarize the third point. If the way God works and the way God speaks should motivate us toward working together in sanctification, how should we respond? Essentially in one phrase, "Speak the truth in love," Ephesians 4:15. We should cultivate actively asking God to help us love our brothers and sisters, praying for that. We should move toward people, as I said earlier, if you see somebody and you sense maybe something's not right, ask that second question or third. And when someone is hurting

and you know they are hurting and you know you don't have the answer, you don't know what they're going through, you don't have any idea what you should say, you can still move toward them and say, "I care about you. Help me understand what you're feeling. I don't understand but I care about you. Tell me how you're doing." And listen, and in doing that you're just like Jesus, our sympathetic high priest who feels with us and in that, even Job's friends had it right. Remember Job's friends? They showed up after Job had all these catastrophes and they sat with him for a week before they said anything. That's a little bit of a long time but he had gone through quite a bit. They sat with him for a week and mourned with him. That's love.

So speak the truth in love begins by loving but then you've got to speak. You have to be willing to teach and admonish. You've got to be willing to confront others. Some wisdom, yes, ask questions. Don't make declarations and don't try to just shoehorn things in, but be sensitive, but be willing to point to the Scriptures.

And the speaking part, one of the things I think that the Lord has shown me, I was reading something that D. A. Carson wrote. He said we mistake nice for love. I think that's really true in the South. We think that being nice is loving. Being nice is not a spiritual gift. I mean, kind, yes, but kind is benefiting. Nice is just polite, comfortable, keep our distance. You think I'm a nice guy. I think you're a nice guy. We are both nice, living our separate lives, but we're nice. No, nice is not love. Love moves toward people. Love confronts when it has to. Love says the hard things. Jesus is love and Jesus said the hard things. Jesus confronted.

So we have to speak because we love but what should we speak? We should speak the truth. Now this is where even the newest believer who's got the Spirit can speak the truth. Now we should all be trying to understand the Scriptures and I think it's important for us not to try to be careful that you understand, you know, you're sharing a verse because you know what it means. But maybe think of it like this, the manna principle. I think this is really something that God wants us to be more aware of. A lot of times what the person that he brings you across their path, I mean think about it, God's sovereign, right? He's got his plan working. To us, everything is a surprise, right? Suddenly you're surprised by this circumstance you didn't expect. What do I do? I had not planned for this. I see this person in need. They are having this distressing situation. I didn't have a chance to study, do homework ahead of time. I don't know what to say. Well, the Lord put you there, did he make a mistake? What was the manna that you've been eating today? You know, the word of God is supposed to be like manna on a daily basis, right? You're supposed to need some each day just like they gave manna. That's why he gave the manna so that you would know that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. You need my word every moment of every day. What's the manna that you've been feeding on most recently? "Lord, give me something. What was I thinking about this morning? What was I studying? What did we talk about on Sunday?" Share that. "I know this doesn't seem like it may relate but something God has been ministering to me with is showing me," and you just say that. Now the person on the receiving end, you need to be humble. I need to be humble. I'm sitting there thinking, "That has nothing to do with what I'm going through." The word of God always has everything to do with

what you are going through right now. Any passage in the word of God is relevant right now and it may not be scratching exactly where you're itching but it will scratch somewhere that you should be itching. So you humble yourself and say, "Lord, let this word speak to me," and it's amazing how when you do that, somebody hits you with something that you didn't even think was a problem and you're like, "You've given me something to feed on. I've got strength, I've got nourishment to carry on a little longer. Thank you, brother. Thank you, sister." I just think we've got to be more confident in the word, confident in God's ways and how he has made us, and confident in the word.

And sensitive, yes. Of course. We try to get better at it and sometimes the person may have to say, "Listen, you've given me enough. I've got enough manna right now. Stop talking." Okay, that's okay, you've got to do some of that too. That's admonishing in a different way, right? You admonish me, now I'm going to admonish you because I love you. When we work together like this, we show the world what God looks like. We show the world the amazing reality of diverse people with different gifts, different ways of thinking, different backgrounds, who love Jesus Christ, who learn to move toward each other, past our differences, focusing on what we have in common which is our need for Jesus and Jesus' sufficiency, and we start sharing that and the love just comes flowing through. This is what Jesus was talking about in John 17, "That they may be one, even as we are one. I in you, Father, and you in me, that they may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." We've got to get doing this, not just hearing it but doing it. Let's pray for one another, that God will help us become more faithful in pursuing sanctification together.

Let's pray together.

Father, we do ask that you would help us to apply these things to our lives and our hearts. Help us realize the urgency of the moment. We don't know how much time we have. We don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. We don't know the needs that we're going to have tomorrow and the needs of our brothers and sisters tomorrow and we could help them today. Help us, Lord, help us just to walk with you and love you and to live before your face in such a way that we see these opportunities and then help us be bolder and humble to trust that you put us there, that you are with us to step out and move toward one another. God, we ask you to do this so that your purposes will be fulfilled, that we will grow up as a church to look more and more like Jesus, and that the world will know that he is who he says he is. We pray this in his wonderful name. Amen.