

January 26, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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CHANGING Ephesians 4:11-16

Paul the Apostle is one of the great illustrations in history of the change that takes place when a person is overtaken by Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. He was radically, instantaneously changed. Peter, James, John and the original eleven apostles do not demonstrate such an immediate radical change. In fact, it is a bit difficult to determine exactly when the miracle of salvation took place in their lives.

However, all of the original apostles, all of the first followers of Christ (the 120 who were in the upper room, Acts 1:16), and every true believer since their time, have this in common: Because we are born again, we are constantly changing, acting less the sinner and more the saint. That is the intent, the clear plan of Jesus Christ, the builder of the Church. His plan is that every person who He places as a building block in the building of the Church will progressively take on the characteristics of the Chief Cornerstone, which is Himself.

How does the Builder of the Church expect that to happen? Is it some kind of mystery, some sort of magic? Does it just sort of happen like the waves of the sea rolling to the shore hour after hour, day after day, year after year? Actually, Jesus the Master Builder has a great plan by which we blocks become like Him, the Chief Block. He has provided everything we need for the transformation to take place. All we need to do is follow His instruction and use His provisions.

The irony is that people don't have to follow the Lord's plan if they choose not to. But if we don't submit to the plan, we will not become like Christ and we will also reveal a sad truth and horrible reality about ourselves.

So what is the plan? The Master's plan is scattered throughout the New Testament epistles. It is also revealed in very precise and helpful statements in the book about Church Building, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which we are studying in our evening meetings. Read again Christ's plan for us to change into His character.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Let's turn the diamond and look at several aspects of the plan for change.

The Resources for Change.

The first and important resource for change is the Word of God. Consider the source and profitability of Scripture. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

That Scripture is inspired by God means that it is supernatural. Scripture is God's character revealed. To describe the Bible as breathed out reveals that it is coming from within God Himself. Scripture is the mind of God revealed to humanity. Scripture reveals the character of our Creator. Therefore, Scripture is of absolute, non-negotiable authority. Though rebels against God resist the authority of Scripture in this life, they will be judged in eternity by the words of God's book.

Human wisdom has no such authority. Throughout the ages there has been great conflict between the wisdom of man and the

wisdom of God revealed in Scripture. Solomon pointed out the difference between God's wisdom and human foolishness throughout Proverbs. Paul pointed out the difference in 1 Corinthians 1. James 3:14-17 pointed to this difference. In the great conflict, Satan demonstrates great skill in mixing the truth of Scripture with the error of hell to make it sound like truth and good teaching. This is called "angel of light" stuff.

Such truth mixed with error is very common, very popular in today's "therapy" sermons. Religious spokes-people stand before gullible people and speak authoritatively about what they need in order to feel good about themselves, or how to be successful in their world, or how to come to grips with their past, or how to get control of their lives, or how to find happiness and satisfaction in this passing life.

That kind of human-centered, human-sourced teaching will not change anyone into the character of Christ. Preaching God's Word will bring change. We preach Scripture because it is profitable. The text reveals that Scripture is profitable for teaching. Teaching implies that something is missing, there is a deficiency, something needs to be learned. We are more likely to listen to teaching when we realize that we are not all that we should be. Teaching provides instruction so that we can learn what to do, why to do it, how to do it. And, in this context, "it" is becoming like Christ.

Second, Scripture is profitable for reproof. The Greek word (*elengko*) means to bring under conviction. It is the picture of a prosecutor who presents evidence that the indicted person is guilty. Our nature does not like to be exposed as wrong.

Third, Scripture is profitable for correction. To correct is to bend back into the right way. Scripture not only reveals that we are growing in the wrong direction, but it bends us back into shape as we obey. Human nature resists being bent back into shape.

Fourth, Scripture is profitable for training in righteousness. This term speaks of the upbringing and discipline a parent applies to a child. The intent of Scripture is to instruct us over and over to form good habits of godly discipline.

Reproof, correction, and training in righteousness is where the rebels against their Creator part from the true Church. That kind of preaching is labeled by many false accusations in the rebel's effort to

justify their rejection of it. But those pressures are the only way we will ever become like Christ.

Because of the fourfold profitability of Scripture, it equips us to be what our Builder Christ desires for us to be. *That the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17)*. Scripture makes us competent. Scripture completes us as it makes us "fit" the Master's plan. The pattern is not what is popular, what feels good, or what sinful human nature approves. Our Master determines what *competent* looks like. We are becoming more and more competent as Scripture repairs and prepares us to do every kind of good work. Our primary source for changing into the character of Christ is the Bible.

A second source for facilitating this change is the servants of God. Christ has gifted particular individuals to declare His Word. In the text with which we began this sermon we read, *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12)*.

These two verses teach that there are particular individuals who Christ has chosen, set aside for His service, and equipped to facilitate this changing process. They are different from self-appointed authorities. Throughout history there have been leaders, teachers, spokespersons who have taken this responsibility upon themselves apart from Christ's "giving." Many times the self-appointed facilitators are not even born again, not even Christ's people. Being false teachers, they are agents of Satan to confuse and to truncate the process of becoming like Christ. And sometimes there are genuine believers who desire to be the "spokesperson" but whom Christ has not set apart for that task or equipped to do that task.

What is the task? Christ's servants are supposed to preach Christ's Word. Continuing his argument after establishing the authority and profitability of Scripture, Paul admonished Pastor Timothy, *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers*

to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

Bible preaching is serious business. *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom (v.1)* is a very serious charge. The Christ-called preacher has a fearsome responsibility. Because Christ has set him apart, and because Christ has equipped him, and because Christ gives the opportunity for preaching, he has no other choice.

In the words of Paul to the Corinthian Christians, I must do this! *For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16).*

And adding even more pressure is the reality that those men whom Christ has chosen to preach His Word in order to change people is the fact that in the end he will stand before Christ and give an account of the whole matter. Thus, the writer to the Hebrew Christians challenged the people in the church to make the pastor's job easier. *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrew 13:17).*

What is the person who Christ as equipped and given to the Church supposed to do? *Preach*. Paul admonished Timothy to, *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (v.2).* The command is to declare the message of your King (khruvssw). The preacher is to declare the message when it is convenient and when it is not. Sometimes the text is quite direct and the King's messenger would like to skip that part of the King's message. He cannot. He must declare it with all the authority of the King Himself. Sometimes people are not exactly receptive to the King's messenger. Still he must keep declaring the King's message.

In preaching the Word, the preacher will need to *reprove*. Here is that same Greek word (*elengko*) we saw regarding the profitability of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). It means to convict, confute, expose and call to account. It implies that the preacher's job is to draw out

evidence of the difference between the way people are living and the standard of God's righteousness.

Second, in preaching, the preacher will inevitably *rebuke*. This action is even more painful than drawing out the evidence because it involves pointing out fault, to censure, sometimes sharply. People really don't like that at all. The unredeemed person will not put up with that kind of meddling very long.

Third, the King's messenger will *exhort (parakalleo)*, which means to call alongside the standard of God's Word. It also involves calling the person who has just been exposed of and convicted of sin alongside ourselves for comfort and encouragement.

The attitude that underlies all the reproving, rebuking and exhorting is *complete patience*. This is long-suffering, which means the preacher has to be willing to suffer for a long time with folks. The long-suffering is necessary because people change slowly if they change at all. And all the time the preacher is *teaching* line upon line, precept upon precept.

The reason for the serious challenge to preachers like Timothy follows: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).* We have arrived. There was a day when the conscience of the average person prompted him or her to respect and listen to the Bible. Now each man does that which is right in his own eyes. If the Bible convicts, he refuses to listen and seeks his "safe" place away from reproof, rebuke, correction.

The Scripture and the preacher are the resources for change. Ultimately, the resource is God Himself in the Holy Spirit, as He uses Scripture and the preacher to do His work.

The Reason for Change.

One reason change has to take place under the preaching of the Word is because the Holy Spirit gave Scripture. Contrasting his experience at the transfiguration of Jesus with the Bible, Peter taught, *And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place,*

until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

The Holy Spirit gave the words. God the Holy Spirit authored the words of Scripture. While He used the individual personalities and their circumstances, the message came directly from God. That means that the Bible is supernatural. The Holy Spirit empowered (at giving) and empowers (during reading and preaching) the words. Sometimes during the transmission of the Bible, the human writers were in trances, dreams, or visions. Often, especially in the Gospels and the epistles, the author was simply writing down history or writing letters. Always, the words were infused with Holy Spirit power.

That is a very important principle because the same Holy Spirit works in us today. The Holy Spirit affirms that He is in us. He has to be within the believer because we are possessed by Him as our guarantee. *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).*

We heard the words of Scripture because of the Holy Spirit's ministry to open our ears and hearts. We believed the "gospel of our salvation" because the Holy Spirit gave us faith unto regeneration. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit so that we cannot lose or undo our new birth.

Therefore, because God the Holy Spirit dwells within us, He speaks to our spirit. *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16).* This is not some kind of creepy voice you hear at night when you are all alone in the dark. Rather, because we are regenerated, indwelt, and sealed by the Holy Spirit, we are having a relationship with Him. We are experiencing the Holy Spirit's ministry in our hearts. Again, it is not a warm, inexplicable feeling, but the Spirit is teaching us from His Word and changing us by it.

Therefore, the good and necessary change that is taking place in us is not due to our wisdom or discipline. The Holy Spirit empowers the change. Paul's prayer was, *That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:16-17).*

That first phrase teaches that the Holy Spirit is strengthening the followers of Christ with power. *That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being (v.16).* When the Holy Spirit is doing His ministry, we change. We cannot NOT change. *So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love (v.17).* Christ and the Holy Spirit being equal, both dwell within us. We abide in Christ. And being rooted and grounded in Him, we take on His characteristics.

Think about this formula. For the sake of argument, assume that someone attends Community Baptist Church for ten years. If they attended quite regularly the morning and evening services, they would hear approximately 1,000 sermons from the Bible in that time period. If they only attended morning services, they would hear 500 Bible messages declared.

Now if the Holy Spirit is living in them, and the same Holy Spirit who gave the Bible is speaking to their spirit, we can be pretty sure there is going to be some changes, right? It's only logical to expect as much.

So how do we explain the problem of the person who regularly listens to Bible sermons and experiences no change? Maybe we are not fair with what constitutes change? Okay, what kind of change does the Bible indicate will come about as the Spirit-filled person is convicted, rebuked, corrected, trained by the Spirit-empowered Word?

The Resulting Change.

Because the Holy Spirit is changing us, we know Christ more thoroughly. Continuing his argument to the Ephesian Christians, Paul argued, that we *may have strength to comprehend with all the saints*

what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:18-19).

God the Holy Spirit, working in us, changing us, gives strength to know Him. This good news flows out of the fact that we are being rooted and grounded in Christ (3:17); we are supernaturally made strong. To what end? For what purpose? That we are able to comprehend what saints are supposed to comprehend. The word translated *comprehend* means to overtake. So we are grasping the incredible breadth, length, height, depth of what? This is incredible! The result of knowing God is to be full of God. The love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Filled with the fullness of God. Now that is serious change!

When we are being made full of God, we will be becoming more like Christ. We change into the measure of Christ. The process of saints being equipped to do work of ministry, and everyone coming to be filled with the knowledge of Christ, the fullness of God will keep happening, *until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).*

Another great result is that we are no longer victims of doctrinal error. *So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:13).*

And even better is that we are growing into Christ. *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

Then how do we explain people who hear Bible preaching for years but never seem to change? I am forever grateful for the honesty of the leadership at Willow Creek Community Church back in 2000. Bill Hybels founded the church in 1975 based on the model of asking seekers what they wanted in a church. The organization served for many years as the model for the contemporary church. After twenty-five years of ministry, the leadership acknowledged that the people involved in the ministry were no more like Christ after twenty-five

years than when the thing began. I appreciate that honesty. But an honest assessment didn't change anything as subsequent history has proven.

The owner and builder of the Church, Jesus Christ, plans that we will become more and more like Him. His plan is to accomplish His goal through the preaching of the Bible, which in turn creates a people who minister to each other according to Bible truth, not according to feelings and popular trends. So how do we explain people who are engaged in a Bible-preaching church organization but are not changing?

There are only two options or answers to that question. Option one is that they are Christ's people but are quenching the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as they are hearing the Holy Spirit's instruction from the Bible. Now that possibility leads us to a couple of questions. How long can a Holy Spirit-indwelt person quench the Holy Spirit? Can a person truly be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and quench His ministry for his or her entire life? Not likely.

The second answer is that the person is actually devoid of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the Bible instruction he or she hears does not take root and does not change them.

Neither of those options is good. If you are not growing to be more and more like Christ, you will do well to check for the reason. If you are becoming more like Christ, praise God for His grace, keep changing, and help and challenge someone else to do the same.