

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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

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### **How People Change – Part V**

**Pastor Ty Blackburn**

**Ephesians 4:1-6**

**January 31, 2016**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 4. Continuing a topical series we began at the beginning of the new year. Stepping aside from our regular exposition of the Gospel of John that we have been, four years now in the Gospel of John, and hope to pick up there in several weeks, and back in Chapter 19:16. But today we are in Ephesians 4, Ephesians Chapter 4, and we are continuing a series of messages, that topical series I mentioned which is titled 'How People Change'. 'How People Change', that's the title of the message again today, Part Five of 'How People Change', and the text is Ephesians 4:1-6.

We had begun this series of messages asking the question, the new year, January 3, our first message—*Why don't we change?* Why is it that as professing believers, we find ourselves not growing like we ought to grow, not maturing, not becoming more like Jesus in areas of our lives? Why are we not changing? And so that brings up the question how people change. We noted that one of the reasons that professing believers don't change is because change is something that can only happen, real heart-level change is something that only happens for true believers, and so sometimes we don't change because a person is not truly a believer. They may have a profession of faith, but have not yet been born again. That is one reason, but then another reason is that there are many believers, who are genuine believers, but are not changing because they are failing to follow God's instruction manual, His word. They are failing to follow how He has set forth we are to pursue change.

We've been looking at then, how are we supposed to be changing? What does God say in His word about how we are to become more and more like Christ. We are really talking about the Doctrine of Progressive Sanctification. Sanctification is a word which means '*growing holiness*'. It comes from the same root word as the word '*holy*' in Hebrew and in Greek. So the idea is to become more like God, to become more righteous, and more pure, in our experience. God wills that we are justified forever at the moment we truly believe, we are saved forever at the moment we believe, but yet the Lord invites us, calls us indeed to be holy like He is holy, to grow in grace. And so how do we do that? And why am I not growing as I ought to? That is what we've been looking at.

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Just to remind you briefly of what we've covered so far, we saw from Romans 12 that God wants us to change, real lasting change, to become more like Christ. That happens at the heart level, way down in the soul at the level of worship. So what we are called to do is to turn from our sin, and the idolatry that that sin expresses, and we are to turn from that, and to worship the true and living God, to see ourselves as priests, remember from Romans 12:1. And we offer sacrifices, and our life is to be a continual offering of sacrifices to God, turning at the heart level to worship Him. We asked the question—*How do you do that?* And Romans 12:2 we looked at, through the renewing of our minds. The Scripture, the word of God must get to the heart, and change us, transform us.

We looked at—*What am I called to do? How am I called to do it?* Then we asked the question—*Where does change happen?* We have said today is the third week we have been looking at this aspect of it—*Where does change happen?* In the church, that is our answer, in the church. That is what the New Testament teaches, that where we are sanctified is in relationship with other believers. So we looked again at Romans 12:3-7, how as we use our gifts, two weeks ago we talked about this, as we use our gifts, and we serve one another with our gifts, we become more like Christ.

Last time we looked at Colossians 3, and we saw that we are called to work hard at relationships, and we see that we need to invest in redemptive relationships, that true change happens in the context of redemptive relationships. Now a '*redemptive relationship*', I borrow that term again from Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane who wrote the book How People Change. I borrowed their title for the series too, but I borrowed this term '*redemptive relationship*' from them as well. A redemptive relationship is basically a way to describe relationships in the body of Christ that are purposeful. That we are not just meandering through life relating to one another, just talking about everyday things. I mean, part of that, certainly we go through life and we talk about everyday things when we get together. We may talk about the Braves, or the Falcons, or whatever. We may talk about, you know, our garden. All of those things are fine, but purposeful relationships mean that it is not just that. That there is a sense in which when we get together with other believers, we realize that God's purpose is for us to be involved together in helping one another grow to be like Jesus. So that we are relating with an intentionality, a purpose in mind. That I realize that I need other believers in my life to help me be like Jesus, and they need me in their life to help them be like Jesus.

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So redemptive relationships are relationships where the process of redemption is ongoing. That is, we are on a daily basis helping one another to continue being saved from the power of sin. We believe the Gospel, that you are saved from the penalty of sin at the moment you believe. The moment you believe, you are forever justified in the sight of God. Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That is what the Bible teaches. That you are saved from the penalty of sin at the moment you believe, but then the rest of the Christian life you are to go about being saved from the power of sin, becoming more and more holy and righteous. Little by little, three steps forward, two steps back, but there is this progress that must happen.

So what we have basically seen is—*How are we to change?* We need to work hard at redemptive relationships, and we are going to see that again. That is what the apostle is going to be telling us in Chapter 4 of Ephesians. That essentially, that if we are going to live a life worthy of the calling with which we've been called, we are going to have to work hard at relationships with other believers. It seems like it would be so much easier to avoid them. I mean, not that we all like to have relationships at a certain level, but when you really get down to the nitty gritty, sometimes it's just like, "Isn't this a waste of time?" Well, not according to the New Testament, it is just one of those examples where we reason to bad conclusions because our minds are not right spiritually, and we need to be renewed to see it biblically, the way God sees it. We are to work hard at redemptive relationships. They are not easy, we saw last time, they are difficult. They are going to require a commitment of our time, and our energy, indeed of our very life.

This morning, as we look at Ephesians 4:1-6, we're going to see the Lord gives us some very helpful instruction about how to work hard at redemptive relationships. Let's read Ephesians 4:1-6.

***Ephesians 4:1-6 ~ 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.***

Let's pray together.

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*Our Father, we thank You that the entrance of Your word gives light. And we thank You that it is Your word that revives us, it is Your word that lifts us up out of the dust, it sets us on our feet. It is Your word that gives us eternal life in the first place and it is Your word that continues to sustain us. We pray that You would feed us from Your word, and help us to follow Jesus. We pray in His name, Amen.*

‘How People Change’, we have to work hard at redemptive relationships, and here the apostle Paul, as he is turning the corner in the book of Ephesians, this passage, Ephesians 4, is very much like Romans 12 that we looked at those first three weeks, in that Paul organizes Ephesians the same way he organized Romans. That is that in Romans, remember, for 11 chapters he unpacks the glorious doctrines of all that God has done for us in Christ. The first 11 chapters are theological, and doctrinal, and then in Chapter 12 he turns to the practical implications of the Gospel that we believe. But he unpacks for 11 chapters, the wonder of all that God has done before he tells us now what we ought to do in response. Ephesians, he has three chapters that unpack for us the doctrine and theology of all that He has done for us in Christ, and then the last three chapters then are again practical. Not every one of his epistles follows this outline, but this is one he uses a number of times. He starts with the doctrinal and then he moves to the practical. And so it is instructive to look at how, what is the transition? How do you take your theology and then put it into your life? How do you walk out what you believe? You see, in both places, one of the things he gets to right at the beginning is—relationships. The way that you walk out your Christian life is in relationship. That is what he is saying here in these verses we just read, and he is going to continue. In fact, the first 16 verses are all about the unity of the body of Christ. It is quite instructive actually, if you look at just the outline of Chapter 4. Verses 1-16 of Chapter 4 are all about the unity of the body of Christ. Then in Verses 17-32, the last 16 verses, are about the purity of the believer, or the purity of the body of Christ. So that what you see is unity and purity go hand in hand. You want to be more pure, you want to be more righteous, then you need to be one with the body.

Now, we’re going to begin looking at this first section that deals with unity. Work hard at redemptive relationships, it’s not easy, it requires commitment, it requires time, energy. How do we do it? And I think we see three things in the passage, these first six verses, that I want to call our attention to. Basically, three instructions that we have here in the passage. The three points are going to be in the forms of imperatives. The first thing we need to do, you need to *Remind Yourself Why* to work hard at redemptive relationships. That is the first imperative, *Remind Yourself Why*.

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### 1) Remind Yourself Why:

Paul begins this exhortation to unity, to work hard at relationships, by saying in Verse 1:

***Ephesians 4:1 ~ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,***

Listen, he is saying, and then he is going to start talking about how to work out the relationships.

***Ephesians 4:2-3 ~ ...showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

But first of all he says *Why?* He answers the question *Why?* He says, “You must do this because it is in this way that you will walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you’ve been called.” Walk worthy, in fact, the main verb in the first six verses, there is really one main verb in the Greek, and it is the verb ‘walk’. So that the main instruction in Verses 1-6 is ‘walk worthy’, and you could actually say that that is really a rubric over the last three chapters. That what he says, he gives the glory of all that He has done for us in Christ, but then he says in Chapter 4:1, “Now walk worthy of the calling with which you’ve been called.” That is the exhortation of the Christian life. “Look what God has done, and now walk in a manner that honors that.” The main verb is ‘walk worthy’, and then we are going to see there are two secondary verbs that also turn into imperatives for us. But ‘walk worthy’ is really reminding yourself why. You have to work hard at relationships and *Remind Yourself Why*, because it is the only worthy thing to do.

This word ‘worthy’, means ‘*of like value or worth, balanced*’. The original usage of this word, this Greek word that is translated ‘walk worthy’, or ‘worthily’ here, was used in describing a balance, or a set of scales that when they were in balance it was worthy, the value was right. You see, in the old days, when you had to buy a pound of sugar, the way you knew what a pound of sugar was, it didn’t come pre-packaged with a label on it, you went to the store, the market, and then they weighed it out for you. They put a pound weight on one side, and then they kept pouring sugar in until what? Until it balanced, until the value was the same, until the worth was the same. What he is saying is, “Look at all that God has done for you in Christ. Look at the incredible weight of that, and now, how can you live any other way, can you not look at that and balance your own life in accordance with

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that?” What he is basically doing is reminding them of all that he said in the first three chapters. Let’s just review them quickly, so that we will remind ourselves of what this calling is that Paul has laid out in Ephesians 1, that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you have received. He starts off in Chapter 1:3, and he says:

***Ephesians 1:3 ~ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,...***

He says, “Listen, what does it mean to be a Christian? You say you live like a Christian, well remember what it means to be a Christian.” Verse 3:

***Ephesians 1:3 ~ ...who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,***

He says, “Walk in a way that shows that you realize what you have received. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Then he basically, from Verse 3 to Verse 14, recounts them.

***Ephesians 1:4 ~ ...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,***

You were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Verse 5:

***Ephesians 1:4-5 ~ ...In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons...***

You are the elect of God, chosen before the foundation of the world, you have been predestined to adoption. You have been adopted into His family, and He has made everything happen in your life, every detail, every moment of your life has been put together so that you would come to be in the family of God. It is not an accidental thing that you are a child of God. Then he says in Verse 6 that He freely bestowed on us His grace in the beloved. He has poured it out on us. In Verse 7 we have redemption, we have been redeemed back from slavery, through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He has lavished on us. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are the recipients of grace, and not just grace, not begrudging grace, lavish grace. He has poured out His grace upon you, His favor is all over you. If you are a Christian and you are seeing yourself rightly, according to the Scriptures, you are bathing in the favor of God. You may not feel that, because you’ve forgotten the Gospel. We are sheep, we are dumb, we forget. It is encouraging that Jesus became a lamb so that He could save

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us sheep, and obviously a lamb can be noble. I guess it is the fallen world that messes sheep up so much. But you know, you don't train sheep, they forget. They don't do tricks in the circus because they apparently can't learn, be trained. You remember all that God has done for you. He has lavished His grace upon you, His favor, He has brought you into His family. He sees you as He sees His precious Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Verse 10, He has brought you to Himself in a way that, he says:

***Ephesians 1:10 ~ ...with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ,...***

We used to be separate from Him, alienated, He has brought us back, and He is bringing all things back together under His Son, the Lord Jesus, His kingship, His lordship.

Then you go to Chapter 2, and he says, "Remember these blessings you have received, and appreciate them in their true context." Chapter 2:1, remember where you came from.

***Ephesians 2:1-2 ~ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked...***

You weren't just sick, you were dead. There is nothing you could offer to God. You didn't need a boost up, you needed to be resurrected to get back to God. And look how awful we were. We were dead in our sins, our trespasses and sins in which we formerly walked. We were walking in trespasses and sins. Not only were we walking in trespasses and sins, we were walking according to the course of this world, this ungodly world. We were walking in the mindset of this ungodly world. We were committed to its values. According to the prince of the power of the air, that is, not only were we walking according to the ungodly values of the world, we were walking according to the values of Satan himself. We were walking not just in the course of this world, but in the course of Satan himself. We were just like our dad, as Jesus told those Jews in John 8:44, remember what He said to them? "You are of your father, the devil." This is what Paul is saying here. We were, before we were saved, of our father, the devil. He wanted to be like God, he didn't want to honor and worship God, and so every one of his offspring, spiritually, Adam and Eve, what did they do? Eve wanted to be like God, that is why she ate the fruit, Genesis 3. So we were conceived in iniquity, we were walking according

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to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. And look at Verse 3:

***Ephesians 2:3 ~ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind,...***

We were creatures that were ruled by lust and our minds were filled with those lusts. When you look at that, we were like animals, operating on instinct only. Nothing noble and pure, we were, as he says there:

***Ephesians 2:3 ~ ...and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.***

When God looked at us, what did He feel toward us? What ought He have felt toward us? Wrath. The urge to punish and to judge. But look at Verse 4:

***Ephesians 2:4-5 ~ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),***

God looked at you and me, in our misery, and our wretchedness, nothing lovely, nothing attractive to a holy God, and yet He loved, He saved, He made us alive in Christ. He caused us to be born again to a living hope. He sent forth His word and healed us. By grace you've been saved, through faith, He brought you into His family. Then he says, not only did He bring you into His family, Verses 11 and following, he says, "Listen, He brought you back to Himself. You were His enemy, and He has made you not only His friend, He has made you His child, His son and His daughter."

But then he says, "He has transformed your relationships with one another." In Chapter 2, Verse 11, remember he is talking to a group of Gentile and Jewish believers, mostly Gentiles in Ephesus, as most of the churches of the Mediterranean world were, a small number of Jews usually, and a large number of Gentiles. And he is reminding them, "Listen, it is amazing that you are in the same church. God has brought Gentiles together with Jews." Look what he says, where we were. Very few of us have Jewish heritage. This would be true of almost every one of us, a few exceptions, Verse 12, and this is what it was like to be a Gentile:

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***Ephesians 2:12 ~ remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise,...***

You were separate, you were excluded, you were a stranger, you had no hope, and you were without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, Verse 13:

***Ephesians 2:13 ~ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.***

God has brought you to Himself. What an astounding work is the work of salvation. What a great and vast distance is it for someone to go from being a child of wrath to being a child of God, and it happens by His grace. So Paul says, “You have been brought from being an enemy of God to being loved and treasured by God.” And when that happened, he is going to go on to say, “He has not only reconciled us to God, He has reconciled us to one another.” So he says, “Look, Jew and Gentile, you are worshipping together. You are now one body.” That is amazing! In every corner of the world you could find racial animosity. In America we certainly have had our horrible history of it with slavery, and with racism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the south, but you find it everywhere you go—racial hatred, animosity. But the place that it is broken is at the cross, because those who are the most different, and distant from God, and who consequently are the most distant from one another, when you get close to God, you get close to one another, and that is what he says. He says, Verse 14:

***Ephesians 2:14 ~ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,***

He goes on to say that Jew and Gentile now, as different as they were, as distant as they were, are now being made into a temple to the living God, for God to dwell in His people.

Then in Chapter 3 he is going to say something really phenomenal. I’m going to just kind of summarize it, because I’ve got to get onto what we are really focusing on, Chapter 4. He’s going to say in Chapter 3 that basically, he says, “Listen, I was called to preach the mystery of Christ.” And you are like, “What is the mystery of Christ?” as you read through Chapter 3, “What is he talking about?” Then he explains it, “The mystery of Christ which was hidden from ages past is that God, in His Son, in the Christ, was going to take Jew and Gentile and make them one

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before Himself. He was going to bring people that are so different together in His presence.” This was the mystery of Christ, this was something that God had planned from long before the creation of the world. And in this, he explains that He is going to use that, the making of people that are so different into one, that somehow preaches the Gospel to the spiritual powers in the heavenly places. This is what he is saying in Verse 10, or look at Verse 9:

***Ephesians 3:9-10 ~ and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.***

He is saying that when you and I are one that the Gospel of God’s glory, and the Gospel of His amazing purpose in eternity is proclaimed in the spiritual realm. That is, that the demons and the angels are watching, and when they see us become one, the angels rejoice and give glory, and the demons tremble under the awareness that God’s purpose is being made known.

Now, he says, “That is what we are called to do. We are called to live lives that proclaim God’s glory, even into the spiritual realm. You were formerly under God’s wrath. He has brought you to Himself, He has brought you to one another,” now he is saying, “Work at relationships so that you can do this.” And then Chapter 4, Verse 1 he says, “Now, walk worthy of that calling.” That is a high calling, walk worthy of that. Get the balance right. If God has done all of this for you, how can you not give all to Him and His purposes?” So he says, “Remind yourself why.” Why are you to work hard at relationships? Because this is of great importance to God, and that when we work, and we labor through the difficulty that comes in relationship, when we labor at that, we are giving glory to God in ways that we cannot even see or imagine. He is pleased and His praise is going forth. So *Remind Yourself Why*, that is the first point. Work hard at relationships, how? Three things, the first thing is *Remind Yourself Why*, and that is what we just talked about.

### 2) Hold Yourself Back:

Secondly, *Hold Yourself Back*. I told you there were three imperatives—*Remind Yourself Why*, secondly, *Hold Yourself Back*. This is the second verb in the passage that unfolds this idea of what it means to walk in a manner worthy. ‘*Have been called*’ is also a verb, but ‘*walk in a manner worthy*’, there are two participles that

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modify *'a worthy walk'*. I mentioned that the main verb is *'walk worthy'*. There are two participles in the Greek that modify this main verb, and the first in Verse 2 when it says *'showing tolerance'* in the NASB. *'Showing tolerance'*, that is one of the participles that says, "This is how you walk worthy, you show tolerance." The second one is *'being diligent'* in Verse 3. So that is going to be the two points the rest of the way. Our second point is going to come from showing tolerance, and our third point from being diligent.

So our second point, *Hold Yourself Back*, comes from this phrase, *'showing tolerance for one another'*. This word is an interesting word, most of the other translations say something like *'bearing with one another'*. The King James says *'forbearing one another'*. The verb actually means *'to hold in or to hold up'*, it means *'to restrain'*, it means that you realize you need to wait, you hold yourself back. The idea is that you want to move forward, but you hold yourself back, and so that's why I said *Hold Yourself Back* is the point. That really connotes what it means. I think showing tolerance, this is one place where I think the NASB, the word is unfortunate, because the word *'tolerance'* has just been messed up in the last 20 years, since they changed it to this in 1995. It doesn't mean what it used to mean. So *'bearing with one another'* would be a little better, but I think *'hold yourself back'* to me is the best description that I can come up with. He says, "If you are going to walk in a manner worthy, you are going to remember why you are supposed to live this way, and you are going to live a life that is balanced, and that reflects what God has done for you. You need to hold yourself back. It's a present tense Greek verb. Remember that the Greek present tense means the kind of action, not so much the time of the action. It's the kind, and it means continuous, ongoing. That's what the present tense means in Greek. So he's saying, "You will need to be continually holding yourself back in relation to one another."

I love the realism of the Scriptures. If you're going to get in relationship with other people, and you're going to work hard at redemptive relationships, what you're going to find is you're going to have to continually be holding yourself back, because when you get together, what's going to happen? When you put iron sharpening iron, what's happening? Friction, and our natural disposition, our old man, is going to want to rush forward and correct, and attack, and defend. And he says, "If you're going to really live a life worthy of the calling to which you've been called, you must be committed to continually holding yourself back, continually bearing with one another."

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The picture is like a dam is about to break. It's like somebody's doing something and you're irritated. You're angered by your perception of what they've said, and the dam's about to break, and you've got to hold it back. You think, "I can't hold it back." Some of us are better than others. Some of us struggle with unleashing our anger, and are more apt to yell. Other people do their anger in a different way. They're passive aggressive. They retreat, but they're letting you have it, just in a different way. So the idea is when we want to let someone have it, hold yourself back. That's what he's saying in this verse. That's what it means to bear with one another.

Now, I love the fact that not only is God realistic about what it means to be in relationship, but He also provides instruction on how, because the question is, how do you do that? How do you hold yourself back when you're relating to people and they're offending you? How do you hold yourself back? Well, he gives us three prepositions in Verse 2 that help us to understand what this means. There are three prepositions in four words. Look with me at Verse 2:

***Ephesians 4:2 ~ with all humility and gentleness,...***

Do you see that prepositional phrase? ...with all humility and gentleness,... And then the second prepositional phrase:

***Ephesians 4:2 ~ ...with patience,...***

Then:

***Ephesians 4:2 ~ ...showing tolerance for one another...***

And then the last prepositional phrase:

***Ephesians 4:2 ~ ...in love,...***

Do you see that? So there are three prepositional phrases with four different words there, because in the first, we get two words in that first preposition: ***...with all humility and gentleness...*** The second one is ***...with patience...*** and the third is ***...in love...*** So there are four words that Paul brings up that are basically building blocks that you can use to dam up your desire to let someone have it, these four words. So under hold yourself back, there are four sub-points, and the first word is humility. ***...with all humility...*** He emphasizes it by putting it first. It's the first

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thing we need is humility, to hold yourself back. Not only that, but he adds the adjective *all* to emphasize you've got to really be committed to this humility thing. If you're going to be in redemptive relationships, you're going to feel the desire to move forward when you need to hold back. How do you do that? You've got to put on humility. This word *humility* is a compound word which literally in the Greek reads like this: lowliness of mind. It's *lowliness* and *mind* put together, these two words. So it means lowliness of mind. If you're going to hold yourself back, one of the best things that you can do is remind yourself when you're feeling anger or sometimes somebody will say something to us, and we just immediately perceive what they mean by that, we think, and you want to say something right back. "What do you mean by that? What are you talking about?" This is learning to stop that, and put on lowliness of mind. One of the best ways you can do that is remember, "Who am I and what do I know? How do I know what that person meant by that?" Isn't that just really obvious when you think about it? Haven't you had that experience where you thought somebody meant something, and then an argument happens? In marriage, this is something that happens, isn't it? Especially in marriage, because it seems like us guys, we can't hear that well. We don't hear what they say a lot of times.

We were talking about this the other day in men's Bible study, how often you hear that. "I told you this yesterday." "No, you didn't." I've kind of learned to just say, "Well, okay, I guess you did," because she seems to be more reliable at remembering than I do. So after 29 years, I've finally learned that. But how much do I know? I don't know what you meant by that. I may not have even heard it correctly, and if I heard it correctly, how could I possibly understand your motive? So lowliness of mind just realizes, "Hey, I am not God. I don't know what you meant by that or what you're thinking by that," so putting that on just begins to say, "Wait a minute. It seemed like that was offensive, but I don't know." I have to put a lowliness of mind on.

To go beyond that, this lowliness of mind means to remember who I am, and who am I? I'm a slave. I'm not the King. Jesus is the King. I'm His slave. And so slaves don't have rights anyway, so why am I even bowing up and getting upset? This is where we think we know what somebody means. One of the ways that we can practically work this out is learn to ask questions rather than make pronouncements. "You're wrong." There are not many places where that sentence ought to come out that way. There may be some, but not many. 95% of the time we want to use that, we are wrong. It's better to ask a question. "What did you mean by that? I'm not sure I understood what you meant by that. Why did you say that?"

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How are you feeling about that?” You just ask a question. That’s putting on lowliness of mind. “I need to know more. I don’t understand.” And remembering that I’m a slave, I don’t have any rights anyway.

That leads to the second point that he says, the second building block. It’s not just lowliness of mind, humility, but the second one is gentleness. *...with all humility and gentleness...* I think there’s one preposition for those too, because they go together. Do you see that? *...with all humility and gentleness...* and then he says *...with patience... ...in love...* They get their own preposition, but humility and gentleness go together.

Gentleness is really a hard word to translate into English. The word that’s translated *gentleness*, let me share with you a definition I got from a New Testament dictionary. It’s an inwrought grace of the soul, and it is primarily expressed in the heart toward God. It’s an inward attitude. It’s the attitude of spirit where we accept God’s dealings with us as good, and do not dispute or resist. It’s an internal attitude toward God, that says, “I really have no basis with which to dispute anything that You do in my life.” This is a very important quality. “I’ve got no beef with You in anything that You do with me.”

If we were thinking sanely, we would always manifest gentleness, because if we want what we think we’re owed, then we’re going straight to hell. No, we’re not owed anything by God except His wrath. What we have received is His grace and His love, and as His slave again, a slave has no rights. A slave has no agenda. “So Lord, You’ve put me in this situation now where this person seems to be saying something that’s mean or hostile to me, but I’ve got no beef with You. You have a purpose in this. I accept all of Your dealings as good. You know I needed this.”

This is like David. Remember when he’s with his men traveling in Israel, and the wicked guy Shemei starts throwing rocks at him and cursing him. Can you imagine the king with his army, and this guy has the audacity to throw rocks at him and start cursing at him? That is a stupid man right there, a sinful, wicked man. One of the guys next to him says, “Let me go cut down that dog with my sword,” and David says, “No, leave him alone. The Lord has sent him here to curse me.” This is after he had sinned with Bathsheba, and God’s told him that all kinds of bad things are going to happen to remind you of the wickedness of your life. He said, “I can’t dispute what God is doing. So don’t go kill him. Let’s just ride on by and ignore him, because he’s not of consequence. But He’s reminding me.”

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So what God is doing, when you see it from God's vantage point, like this person in my life, whatever is happening is from the Lord. It changes, and so the meekness really is the way we often translate this word, and that really gets at the inner heart of it. And what happens if you are meek in your heart is you'll be gentle in your disposition. Gentleness is the outside of this word. That's why in the English they put *gentleness*. But it's not just being gentle externally. It's an inward attitude that results in that.

So hold back your flesh with humility and gentleness. These two go together. You see them in Philippians 2, the passage that James read earlier. It says there in Philippians 2:

***Philippians 2:3 ~ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;***

***Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,...***

And what did He do?

***Philippians 2:6 ~ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,...***

He didn't think about how people were treating Him. He became humble, and lowly, and a servant, and what does it say? I love this passage:

***Matthew 11:28 ~ "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.***

Aren't those precious words? The Savior is beckoning us to Himself "If you're tired, you're worn down, and you're trying in your own energy, come unto Me." And then He says this in Verse 29, "Come unto Me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart." Jesus says that He is what He's just calling us to be. Those are the same words—humility and gentleness. "You can come to Me and you can take My yoke upon you, because this is the way I am. When you come around Me, you will find that I am lowly, and gentle, and meek."

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And so Paul says, “Listen, when you’re trying to hold yourself back, look at Christ. Have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. Remember who you are. If He was a slave, then you are certainly a slave. If He served those who were not honoring Him, why can’t you do the same?” So those building blocks, to hold back your flesh: humility, gentleness, and thirdly, patience. This word patience is interesting. It’s actually very similar to the word for *hold back* in the first place. It’s a compound word which speaks of anger that’s been held onto for a long time, that is, that you’re angry but you’re holding it back. Actually, the word picture of the etymology of this word is of a wind blowing, a sudden movement. So the idea is you’re restraining sudden movement.

So he says, “Hold yourself back with patience. Have this attitude of patience.” I think here you get the idea that when we have this attribute, we realize we have a legitimate reason to be angry. A lot of times, I said earlier, we misinterpret someone. We get angry when we don’t know, because we think we know more than we know. So when you put on lowliness of mind and you put on gentleness, and you come back with a gentle response, sometimes it becomes clear that they really are hurting you, that apparently at least 90% of the problem seems to be over there. And we often overestimate that, but anyway, if most of the problem seems to be over here, and you’re right in seeing that, what are you to do? Put on patience. Put on this idea of longsuffering. It’s when you have a legitimate ground for anger and wrath and you choose not to exercise that and move toward it. This word is used most often in the New Testament to speak of God’s patience towards sinners like you and me. He has legitimate grounds to take action. Every day don’t we give Him more and more reasons that if He were judging us, one sin is enough to condemn us for hell, and we sin, and we sin, and we sin? And look at His patience. So if He shows that to us, then we ought to show that to one another. So put on this sense of patience. Yes, they may be genuinely offending me, but I don’t have a right to act.

Now, let me show you how this goes together. Turn over to Colossians 3. God says the same thing in different places, because we need to hear it over and over again. Look what he says in Colossians 3:12. Look at the combination of words.

***Colossians 3:12 ~ So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another,...***

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That's the same word that we have that I'm saying is *hold yourself back*. So with humility, and gentleness, and patience, hold yourself back (Colossians 3). Then the fourth thing he says is he says you're going to hold yourself back by putting on humility, putting on gentleness, putting on patience, and fourthly, putting on love. ... ***showing tolerance for one another in love***,... Here we go from the negative of really restraining ourselves to hold back, to now positively seeking to bless.

If you think about how God has been patient with you, you also think about how God has loved you. And if He loves me, then I can love this person who's sinning against me, or who I think is sinning against me. That's how you hold yourself back. You've got to be holding yourself back if you're going to be in relationships. You're going to have to go into relationships, and there are some times where you know going in you've got to have these attitudes. Other times it sneaks up on you. You thought it was just going to be a nice day. You walk up, you say something to somebody, and they just send a biting comment right back at you. "What? Where did that come from? Wait a minute. Hold myself back." Humility, gentleness, patience, and love. We said first, "Remind yourself why," secondly, "Hold yourself back," and then the third point is:

### 3) Hurry Yourself Up:

Hold back and then hurry up. That's really how it flows in the Greek. When he says: ...***being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit***... being diligent is a word which means to speed, to hasten, to hurry. In the natural, normal usage of that word, it means to speed. In fact, the word is σπουδή (spoudē), from which we get our English word *speed*. And so it then figuratively means to apply diligence in the sense of you're hurrying and there's a focus about you. "I've got to be focused. I've only got so much time." That's the word.

So he says, "Hurry yourself up. Move." And it's so funny. You hold yourself back in one way. I hold back all the evil in my heart, and I turn it around and put on God's humility, and gentleness, and patience, and love, but you can't stop, because we would just like to say, "Well, I'll just retreat. I've had enough being with you today. I'm going to go somewhere else." No, he says, "Now hurry up and go work on that relationship." That's what he's basically telling you. Hold yourself back, but don't hold yourself back from them in your heart. Go to them, and hurry up.

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And what does he say? **...being diligent to preserve...** There's a participle *being diligent*, but then there's added to that participle an infinitive, *to preserve*. Other translations say *to keep*, *to maintain*. The word is often used to mean *to guard*. The verb here comes from a noun which was used of a warden or a prison guard. Again, present tense verbs, you've got to keep on holding yourself back, and then you've got to be hurrying yourself up to guard. I think he's using these words to really picture the intensity that we need to approach these issues and relationships with. And I think the picture that comes out of that when you think about *guard*, *keep*, I said it's a prison warden or a prison guard, is the noun that that verb came from. It's almost like if you were a warden or you were a prison guard and you heard that there's an escape attempt about to happen. I think you would take notice. It is time to focus on what's going on in a whole different way. We better hurry up and get our act together, right? That's what the word means. Hurry up and guard.

Really it's not an escape, because what he's trying to escape according to the text is the unity of the Spirit. What may happen is the unity of the Spirit may escape. I don't think that's really the best image then. So it's kind of a mixed metaphor. Let's think of it this way. Something precious might be stolen. You guard it. There's a crook in the neighborhood and something precious might be stolen. You keep your eye on it.

When we were traveling in Europe some years back, in England we heard about the pickpockets, and I constantly found myself—I think I put my wallet in my front pocket, and I had my hand in it too. I thought, “If this guy can get around my hand to my wallet and I don't know it, well, I deserve to lose my wallet.” But I'm constantly reminding myself, because you don't just constantly think of that. But I was doing it because I knew that something precious might be stolen. That's what he's saying. You are to look at relationships, and what is it that's precious that might be stolen? It's the unity of the Spirit. So you've got to attend to it and focus on it.

Now, how do you do that? It really pictures aggressive mental activity of guarding the unity of the Spirit, and I think the way that he means for us to do it is explained in Verses 4 to 6. I think that's why he comes up with what he says next: **...being diligent to preserve...** that is, hurrying up to guard:

***Ephesians 4:3 ~ ...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***

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***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.***

He says what may escape or what may be stolen is the unity of the Spirit. That word in English *unity*, in Greek it actually would be better translated *oneness*. It's the same word that then comes up *one, one, one*, with just a little ending on it.

***Ephesians 4:3 ~ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

Guard that oneness. He's saying when you're having a conflict with a believer, what really is at stake is the oneness of the Spirit of God. There's something precious at stake. It's not about the issues that you have and that they have. Those are secondary. What's at stake is the glory of God and the oneness He's given us in Christ. Guard that. Look what he's telling us. He's saying basically, think about it. When you're dealing with another person and you're having a conflict, he's saying, "Hold yourself back. Dam up those angry responses with humility, and gentleness, and patience, and love, and then go after what really matters. Stop worrying about all that doesn't matter. You're a slave. You've got no rights anyway. What are you doing thinking about that? Go after the big stuff."

It's like if somebody's coming to steal your stuff in your house and you're worried about the little Cracker Jack prize that you're protecting, instead of your wife's diamond ring. That's what we do. So he's saying, "Go after the thing that really matters, and what really matters is the unity, the oneness of the Spirit." And how do you do that? How do you go after it? One of the most important things is you start meditating on it and aggressively thinking about it. This person that I'm in conflict with is in the same body as I am. There's only one body (Verse 4). There are not two bodies in Christ. There's one, so they are part of the same body I'm a part of. If something happens bad to my right hand, my left hand cares about it, because all that pain and all the anguish, the whole body is going to be busy dealing with it. In fact, it's probably going to have to care for my right hand a whole lot. It's going to have to do more stuff, because my right hand can't do it. It has an interest in what happens over here. It can't just say, "Well, who cares? I never liked the right hand anyway. He's always trying to act like he's better than I am because he's right-handed." No, we're all one body.

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There's one Spirit. We were all baptized in one Spirit, according to 1 Corinthians 12:14. We were made to drink of one Spirit. There are not two Spirits. They have the same Holy Spirit in them that I have in me. They have one hope, one calling. We're going to the same place. We're on the journey to the same home. If we can't get along here, we're going to be in Heaven together, looking at one another, lamenting the fact that we didn't get along here. The Lord's grace will cover that, but somehow it's better to get it done here. There's one Lord. We have the same Master. We have the same faith. There's one baptism, one God and Father of all. We have the same Father. You see it in the Trinity there. The Spirit, one Spirit, one Lord (Verse 5), one Father. He's reminding us, "Listen, you serve a Trinitarian God. You say you're a Christian. You serve a God who exists eternally in relationship, and you're not willing to be rightly related to another believer? Shame."

So when we think about that and we aggressively in our minds as we're having the conflict, we're reminding ourselves of the truth, and that is speeding after reconciliation, because your heart changes. We really are on the same team. We're not against one another. You're not my enemy. We have the same enemy. It's Satan and his kingdom. We're all about Jesus together. Yeah, we've got this confusion. We've got this issue going on. Yes, and there's some bad, but when you put it into proper context, these are small things. These are the heart attitudes that then will funnel everything else. When you hold yourself back and then you hurry yourself up, reminding yourself of the stakes, then you're working in alignment with the plan and purpose of God to build sanctifying relationships. If you don't come with these attitudes, you're going to have lots more problems.

So that's why he starts off right at the beginning, "This is what we need." And when this happens, if you think about it, when you and I work through difficult problems, you know, we're all going to offend one another. If we get close enough to one another, we're going to offend one another. Just take a number, right? Who's next? That's the way it is. Sinners do that to one another. So when that happens, what are we to do? We're to pursue unity this way. Hold back, hurry up, and when that happens, reminding ourselves why, when we start putting on humility and lowliness, and we start focusing on oneness, and we start serving and loving one another, what happens is you and I overcome obstacles that the world has no idea how to overcome, and the glory of God is made known. This is what Jesus is talking about in John 13 when He says, "They will know you are My disciples by your love, one for another." That's what shows them. When we're one, then the world will know that You sent Me (John 17). "When they are one, then the world

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will know that You, Father, sent Me.” That’s the power of oneness. But even beyond that, we said in Ephesians 3, when we are one, the demons in hell see you and me exhibiting the character of God. He said that Jesus said that He’s lowly and gentle. He’s lowly and meek. How do you know what the Father is like? You look at Jesus. Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. John 1:18 says, “No man has seen God at any time, but the only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, He has exegeted Him. He’s made Him known.” What’s He like? What’s God like? He who dwells in all glory and holiness, transcendent majesty, is humble and lowly, and that the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit love one another in this perfect harmony, and when you and I do it, in the spiritual world powerful things are happening.

So with that kind of enlarged vision, that’s what we’re supposed to do. Be about oneness because the Kingdom of God is really advancing when we do these things. So when conflict happens, what we ought to do if we were sane, and we don’t, but naturally when the red light turns red I’m frustrated. “I thought I could make seven in a row. Only six! Man!” So when we run into a conflict and you’re like, “Oh no, another conflict. I can’t believe it. I don’t have time for this,” then, “Wait a minute. This is an opportunity for me to hold myself back, to hurry myself up, and to remind myself and all the people around me of the glory of the God I serve. This is a great opportunity.” If we’re thinking sanely, that’s how we must think.

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer...

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the glory of salvation that You have made known to us in Christ, that You have reconciled us to Yourself, that You’ve made us Your own dear children. You’ve made us to be more and more like Jesus, and You’re going to keep making us more and more like Jesus. Thank You that You have chosen the wisest most perfect, and most glorious way to do that, and that is through relationships with other people who are sinful like us, but who were bought with the blood of Jesus just like us. Help us, God, to learn what that means. Help us to truly work at that, to pour our lives into that, into one another for Your glory. Father, we pray for those that are here that need to come to You, to come to peace with You today, that never have come to know You in a saving way. May today be the day that they repent, place their faith in such a glorious God and in such a glorious Savior as Jesus. We pray in His Name, Amen.*

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“How People Change – Part 5”

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