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God's Word at Work in You



Cultivating Christian Character - Steve Gregg

In "God's Word at Work in You", Steve Gregg discusses the importance of cultivating Christian character and the role of God's Word in shaping our thoughts and attitudes. He notes that knowledge of the Scriptures alone is not enough, but must be combined with a willingness to submit to God's teachings and allow ourselves to be transformed. Gregg draws parallels between the creative power of God's Word in Genesis and the transformative power of the Word in our lives. The key, according to Gregg, is to obey the teachings of God's Word and not be slothful or disobedient, but to let the Word work in us to bring about lasting change.

Transcript

Tonight we will be continuing our series on the broad topic of cultivation of Christian character. And we come tonight to the subject of the Word of God, particularly as the Word of God works in us to effect the character changes that God desires in us. We talked already about the subject of walking in the Spirit, and certainly the Holy Spirit is one of the principal active agents in our sanctification.

But Jesus also said, as he prayed to his Father in John 17, 17, Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth. So, sanctification is not a work of the Spirit only, but of the work of the Spirit through the Word of God. And tonight I would like to discuss and hope to raise your awareness and appreciation for the Word of God.

I just want to say at the beginning that I was very fortunate to be raised in a family where the Word of God was revered. And although my parents' understanding of the Scriptures was more limited than perhaps it could have been, and it was not a perfect home, it was not in all points a model Christian home, and yet I don't blame my parents for that. They were in many ways the products of the church of their generation.

But at the same time, more than many in the church, my father and my mother had a high respect for the Word of God. My father was not a pastor, but he had a library of theological books that would be equal to that of most pastors. And somehow from my early youth, I had a hunger to know the Word of God.

I cannot count up the times I began as a youth in my preteens with an attempt to read through the Bible. I never got through. In fact, I don't know if I ever got through the book of Genesis in terms of a chronological study through the Bible before I was a teenager.

But I certainly wanted to know the Bible, and I did better in the New Testament as a child than I did in the Old, in terms of getting through it and becoming acquainted with it. But it was when I was 16 years old and when I became absorbed into a tremendous revival movement that God was doing in Southern California where I lived that my life was revolutionized by a deeper encounter with the Spirit of God and a greater opening of my understanding and of my eyes to the Word of God. And I was very fortunate.

I give you this little bit of autobiographical stuff because it may explain somewhat how the topic tonight is dear to my heart. During the revival that came to be called the Jesus Movement in Southern California, which, of course, spread out far beyond Southern California to many countries, actually, and to the entirety of this country, it kind of had its hub in Southern California. And providentially, its hub was pretty much in the church that I attended, no thanks to me.

I was a beneficiary entirely of the movement, not much of a contributor. But it was in that movement that many thousands of young people my age were swept into the kingdom of God. And when I was in high school, there were many of us who were going to church every night for worship and Bible study and then gathering every day at lunchtime at school to just discuss, usually to discuss the material that had been taught the night before.

And I was I found myself to be more knowledgeable of the scripture than the others, to my surprise, because I really felt once I came into a fuller walk in the Holy Spirit, that I really felt like I had known nothing before. It is almost like being born again, again. And I felt like I was a new babe and didn't know anything.

But I found that those with whom I was fellowshiping at lunchtime at my school, the high school, were truly brand new babes in Christ. And there were hundreds of them. We didn't all hundreds of us meet together, but there are about 30 of us that met together.

And and I was the only one who knew anything about the Bible. And I didn't think I knew that much, but it was clear they knew nothing. And so eventually they asked if I would teach them and I began to teach the Bible at that time.

And in those days, every time I opened the Bible, it was a new insight. It was a wonderful time of refreshing and revival. And that and that revival in my own heart and that love for the word of God continued, I would say, up to the present.

It had its times when it would wane a little bit. But for the most part, the scriptures have been my one of my short of God himself, my first love. And to love the scriptures is not

really necessarily that different than loving God himself, although it is possible.

And I think we need to be guarding against this, that we might replace God with the scriptures. That is to say, we can become experts at the Bible and lose God. Because we become fascinated with truths and with theological propositions about God.

And the doctrines of our group or whatever or or other other doctrines that we become fascinated with that are not of our group. That can be more interesting. But the but the point is, it is possible to get so absorbed in the what could be called the academic study of the word of God that we lose God himself.

At the same time, I'm a great believer in academic study of the word of God. I'm not a great advocate of formal schooling, which is not to say there isn't advantage. And I just never had any.

And I and so I've never really been one to push it. But but I certainly believe in intelligence, study the word of God to get to know what it means. But I have seen only too often friends of mine who were spirit filled, zealous Christian people who love the Lord go off to Bible college and seminary and come out as dead as a doornail.

And some of them backslid altogether. But but but knowledge merely in the head is not always. Well, it's not always advantageous.

Paul said knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. But of course, there's no reason why we have to take a pick between those two. We can have both as Christians in our birthright to know God, to know his word.

And to love him and to love his people and therefore to have the best of all resources and hopefully balance in the Christian life. There's many things I could say about the word of God that I'm not going to say tonight. And many of those things can be found in a set of lectures I've done called The Authority of Scripture, where there's probably 14 or 16 lectures in that.

And even there, I don't say all the things I'd like to say about the Bible itself. Tonight, I want to focus on one particular aspect, and that is the way that the word of God works in us to change us. Many of you, I assume, are familiar with an oft quoted scripture.

Second Corinthians 5:17, where Paul said, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new.

In the King James, it says, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. But all modern translations have clarified that the word used there in the Greek is the word creation. If a man is in Christ, he is a new creation.

Oh, about 25 years ago, I suppose, I was reading the book of Genesis and probably

trying to get through it for the hundredth time. Finally, I did get through it, by the way, many times. I was reading Genesis 1. By the way, I always was able to get through chapter 1, even as a child.

And probably there's no chapter in the Bible I've read more times since childhood than Genesis chapter 1, which made me sort of a nightmare to my school teachers when they tried to teach me evolution in elementary school. But once after I was a mature adult, if I have even reached that point yet, I was reading Genesis chapter 1 and it occurred to me. I will say it occurred to me if I was in a more charismatic meeting, I say the Lord showed me.

But since I don't know that all of you would be sympathetic toward charismatic terminology, I'll just say it occurred to me. That there was a parallel in the days of creation, Genesis chapter 1 and the stages of growth in the Christian life. And I even began to wonder whether that was deliberate or whether that was just some kind of a fancy thing that I contrived.

But as I when I got on to that, I began to look at it more closely. And in fact, I was able by comparing scripture to scripture to conclude that the days of creation, in fact, do appear to be a pattern of the new creation of God's work in the believer. Now, what's interesting about that is I've been for many years a great admirer of A.W. Tozer.

And after I had concluded this and taught this very thing, I was in a Greyhound bus one going cross country, reading this little book by A.W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest*. And I came across this statement. Now, I was already teaching this.

I'd never heard anyone say it. I thought it was a great, you know, mighty revelation that no one else had ever seen. And A.W. Tozer said in *The Divine Conquest*, It is hard to miss the parallel between generation as described in the Old Testament and regeneration as described in the New.

That kind of humbled me because I had found it very easy to miss that for many years. But he said it's hard to miss that. So I thought, well, maybe I was more dull than I thought and seeing it wasn't didn't make me as bright as I thought.

But he went on and very much along the same lines that I had that I had thought myself. He said, how, for instance, could the condition of the lost soul better be described than by the words without form and void with darkness upon the face of the deep? And how could the strong yearnings of God's heart over the lost soul be more perfectly expressed than by saying the spirit of God brooded upon the face of the water? And from what source could light come to that sin shrouded soul had God not said, let there be light. At his word, the light breaks and the lost man arises to drink of eternal life and follow the light of the world as order and fruitfulness came next to the ancient creation.

So moral order and spiritual fruit follow next in human experience. And we know that God is the same and his years do not fail. He will always act like himself wherever he is found at work and whatever work he is doing.

Now, A.W. Tozer didn't use any cross references to support his point. But before I ever read that, I already had some. And it was very encouraging to read that in an author who I had come to respect so much.

But the idea of seeing a parallel between the creation in Genesis chapter one and the actual experience of the Christian, the inward spiritual experience of the Christian was justified not merely by Paul saying, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation and making the assumption that the old creation was a pattern of the new creation. Assumption was not necessary. The apostle Paul established it beyond question in second Corinthians chapter four.

And there Paul said in verse six, for it is the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Now, you may have noticed what Paul did there. Paul said, God, who originally back in Genesis one called the light to shine in darkness, has done something analogous in our hearts.

He has caused the light to shine in our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And Paul is, of course, speaking of conversion there. He's talking about the time when we first saw the light, as it were, and when we realized that Jesus was who he said he is.

And we saw the light of the world and became believers. Now, I won't go over all the parallels here, although I have taken as much as three hours in lectures on other occasions to go through Genesis chapter one and to cross reference scriptures all over the place to demonstrate that there is a progressive growth. In the believer's life, that is that parallels those stages of creation, I don't want to do all the work for you.

I'll just drop that hint and let you do your own homework and see what you can come up with. But I will say this, I believe it is more than a little significant that what God begins with in Genesis chapter one is a formless and void and in darkened creation. But after he has gone through six days, what does he have in the end? He has a man and a woman made in his own image.

Now, the purpose of sanctification, the working of God in our lives is to reproduce Jesus in us so that when he is finished with us, he will have in you a man or a woman in his own image. He is seeking to bring us into his image, as Paul said in second Corinthians three. Interesting how many of these verses come from second Corinthians.

The second Corinthians three eighteen, Paul said, but we all with unveiled face beholding

as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord are changed from glory to glory into that same image from stage to stage into that same image. And there are once this is seen, it really gives us something to look into. It gives you something to pursue in the scriptures.

And it's amazing the things you can find there about this parallels. But it one thing that can be said overall and in summary is that we have in Genesis one something beginning very, very unpromising, a formless, empty, void, dark creation. The only thing promising in the original state of it is that little statement at the end of verse two.

The Spirit of God was brooding over it. That word brooding or some translations say hovering or moving is the Hebrew word there is used also in Deuteronomy thirty two, where God compares himself to a mother eagle caring for Israel like like little eaglets. And it says that I, Jehovah, brooded over you like like an eagle broods or hovers over her young.

Same word that the spirit brooded over this darkened creation before you were converted. The Holy Spirit already had designs on you. He already had a desire to see something come about.

And the desire of the spirit was fulfilled in that sixth day of the creation when there came forth the crowning act of God's creative activity. And that is something in his own image. And the Holy Spirit, from the time before you even converted, was brooding over you and had a desire to see you come forth eventually as you eventually will in the image of Christ.

Paul said this is predestined for those who are believers. In Romans eight, twenty nine, he says whom he foreknew. He also did predestined to be what conformed into the image of his son.

That's been predestined. It's interesting how many people think that scripture is talking about God predestining someone to be saved. Doesn't say anything about predestined someone to be saved.

It says that he's predestined that those who are saved will be conformed to the image of his son. What is predestined is not that we would get saved, but what will happen to those who are. God is determined that those who are saved when he is finished with his work will be in the image of himself, in the image of his son.

And so we have this parallel. Now, I don't just say this for the sake of, you know, being novel. I say this because it's very relevant to our study of conforming into the image of Christ.

Of cultivating Christian character so that we have the character of God reproduced in us. In the creation story, I will, like I say, will not go over all the details of all six days at this point. But there are some broad observations that can be made that are worthwhile.

One is that when God created everything in those six days in Genesis chapter one, he didn't do it all at once. He didn't just show up and say, let it all be just the way I want it, and then it all was just the way he wanted it. It got there by stages.

It got there over a course of six days. It was an incremental work. And in your notes I put that it was incremental and seasonal.

Now, by seasonal, I don't mean that it was seasonal in the sense that, say, basketball season comes or gardening season comes. But seasonal meaning there was a season for this growth, followed by a season of inactivity. Each time God made something, there was this activity, a crisis of creation, followed by a period of rest between an evening and a morning that transpired before anything else was done.

So that also as God works in our life, bringing us into the image of Christ, there are crises of change that take place. And then there are periods of what seems to be stasis, where we're not really changing, or at least if we are, it's not visible to us. It may be that we are.

I suspect that in saying, let there be light, and then the next thing comes is nighttime, and there's an evening and a morning. It's as if that light was being tested to see if it would survive a period of darkness. You know, in Christian experience, you will have alternate periods of ecstatic learning and progress where it's genuinely thrilling.

And then alternately periods where it seems like God isn't doing all that much in your life. It doesn't seem like you've changed much. You get frustrated because you're so encouraged by an earlier period of transformation, but not a complete transformation, because you've got more to go, and yet now it seems like nothing's happening.

There are times of darkness and even depression that godly people often have been known to go through. Some of the older Christian mystics called it the dark night of the soul. In our little discipleship comic books, the growth books, we refer to them as tunnels.

You're on this narrow path, and at times this path goes through tunnels, and it's dark in there, and cold, and you wonder if you're still on the path because you can't feel God, you can't see God, you can't see any change. But if you keep on the trail, you come out on the other side, there's light on the other side, and there's more to encourage you later on. But likewise, the creation was incremental.

It didn't happen all at once. It didn't even happen smoothly. It's not like God just began talking and kept talking until it was all made.

He said, let there be light, and that's all He did that day. He didn't do anything else. 24 hours passed, and they said, okay, now let's do something else.

And He did something else, and then there was nothing else happening. Now, of course, I'm taking the story literally. There are Christians who think that the six-day creation is not to be taken literally, and it's not my purpose at this point to establish beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is literal.

I believe it is. But even if it is not, even if each day was an extremely long period of time and so forth, we are left with the narrative the way it is to provide the pattern for what is being depicted. If it didn't happen in precisely the way that it's described, as some Christians doubt that it was, nonetheless, the way that it is described is the way the Word of God has chosen to give it to us in order to depict the principles that we're learning.

And so we can see that growth or progress in the original creation toward its final goal was in steps, in increments. And it was occasional, seasonal. There was a season of change and a season of stasis.

And we need to realize that that isn't necessarily something that should discourage you. Yet it can, because when we learn something new, or we get some new breakthrough and we finally break out of some bondage that's been pestering us for years, and we finally see that we've made some progress and crossed another threshold, we perhaps hope that it'll be like this unbroken for the rest of our lives. And yet, the next thing that happens is a long period of just, as it were, settling in, adjusting to the new situation.

And then, at a point only God knows when, there'll be another morning breaks. An evening comes, a morning comes, and the next morning there's another change. And this is the way it is for our entire Christian lives.

That's what Paul, I think, meant when he said we're being changed from glory to glory, into that same image. By increments, by stages, the change comes. So that's one thing we learn about our own Christian development as we compare it with what happened in Genesis chapter 1. Another thing we find there is that even though the first five days of creation did not produce the final thing that God was after, that didn't come until the sixth day, yet every time God did something, He announced afterwards, it's good, even though it was imperfect, even though it was incomplete.

We know, because we've read the end of the chapter, what God was looking for. In the end, He hoped and did obtain creatures in His own image. But there were stages that had to be passed through before that, which came short of that final result.

But each of those stages was good because each was a work of God. If you have the Spirit brooding over you and in your heart you just long to be like Jesus, you can sometimes be very discouraged to see the areas where you have not yet grown. You see the areas of imperfection.

Ideally, you should look back and see what God has done and see the areas where you have changed. If you are discouraged by the ground that remains to be covered in your spiritual life, you can perhaps take some encouragement by looking back at the ground that is behind you, that you've covered. Whenever I'm going on a long walk, usually because I have to and not for pleasure, and it's a long one, I know the goal is way off there, sometimes it's encouraging for me to look back and see, it's really, we've gone a long way, you know, I mean, we've got 40 blocks to go, and it seems like it's still a long way off there, but hey, we've got 15 of them behind us, that's something.

And in becoming like Jesus, you can either focus on the ground that remains to be covered and be perhaps discouraged, you don't have to even be discouraged if you're doing that, you can just be encouraged, that's where you're going. But you can also look at what God has already done and say, well, He is satisfied that each stage is complete. He made the light and that's all He did the first day, and He said, that's good, that's good.

He didn't say, well, it won't be good until I'm done. It was good at every stage. If you are walking with God, you are not yet perfected.

Paul said that in Philippians chapter 2, remember? Excuse me, Philippians chapter 3. He said, not that I was already perfect, not that I've already achieved or arrived. He said, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, in terms of his past Jewish rabbinical qualifications, that's the things behind he was forgetting. And pressing on to that which is before, or looking to that which is before, I press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul was encouraged to know that, you know, a lot was behind. He didn't even look back, he knew how much was behind. He was just looking ahead and moving on toward the goal.

But he was not discouraged, it sounds to me, even though he said, I am not yet perfect. Do you know Paul wanted to be perfect? I think every Christian wants to be perfect. And therefore, every Christian lives with an unsatisfied goal.

I am content, and Christians are commanded to be content, but I am unsatisfied. And you might have become accustomed to using the words content and satisfied interchangeably. I think there's a difference.

Being content means I'm at peace with the situation as it is now. I'm content with whatever God has brought to my experience and everything so far. But I won't be satisfied until I have, well, as it says in Psalm 17, 15, I shall be satisfied when I awaken my likeness.

My satisfaction comes when I'm like Jesus. To be satisfied suggests that all of your

desires have been fully sated. And yet we live this life as long as we're in this flesh with an unsatisfied goal of being perfect.

And yet it's that dissatisfaction that draws us on. But we can be content with where we have come to so far in the sense that, not that we want to camp there and stay there, but that God has brought us thus far and we're not holding back. If we're not making any more progress at the moment or haven't made more, we can be content if we know that we're not the ones holding back.

We're just waiting for God to do something more. You know, it's like I used to, there's only one time in my life, in my adult life, where I actually held a job, a full-time job, for more than a couple months. And that was a job I held for about a year and a half.

And I was working for a Christian man delivering pottery to stores, to nurseries and stuff. Stoneware pots, driving a truck for him, a little truck. But I would have to go every day to this potter's factory and pick up some pots, get a truckload of pots and then take them around and deliver them.

And many times when I arrived at the potter's factory, they didn't have all the pots available, so I had to wait around for them to finish, for them to come out of the kiln, and I'd watch the potters work. Now, many of you have been potters. I'm sure probably more than half of you have probably done something with a wheel.

I never have. I just never was in a pottery class or anything like that, never had a wheel. And so I was fascinated watching how potters work because they take this lump of clay.

And I mean, this is so I'm sure for you, many of you know this, like you know your name. But it was so fascinating to take this lump of clay that in no way looks like a pot. It's got square corners and it's you know, it's just not it looks like a brick.

It doesn't look like a like a decorative pot. And this guy puts it on a wheel and he wets it and does things with it and starts spinning and starts kneading it with his hands. And it changes.

But after a very long time, it seemed to me, although it's changed a lot, it still doesn't look any more like a pot than it did. It's still, you know, an unformed, unfinished thing. It doesn't look like a brick anymore, but it doesn't look like a pot either.

It looks like some kind of just wad, maybe of chewed up gum that somebody spit out. I mean, he'd have to be a giant, but it'd be a big, a big old wad of clay. And I remember thinking at times, especially when this was new to me as I watched it, that this guy has a long way to go before this becomes a pot.

But if it takes, you know, after two, three, four minutes, it doesn't look any more like a pot than when he started. It certainly doesn't look like it did at first. But he's a long way

from having a pot.

But somehow, I guess he was with his hands. He was feeling, you know, where the he'd occasionally find a rough spot and tear it up, throw away and stuff and just work with that. And at some point, something clicked in the potter's head.

I never could tell when it was going to happen, but totally unexpected to me. I'd see him go. He just do something.

And within a few seconds, he'd shaped a pot. I mean, it was essentially finished. It had to still be painted and glazed and fired and stuff.

But from a glob of clay to what was really quite a nicely shaped pot really only took him, seems to me, about 30 seconds once he decided to go to do that. And as I watched that, like like Jeremiah, who went to Potter's house and he learned some things, I learned some things. I thought about that a great deal because, of course, we know that the scripture says that God is the potter and we're the clay.

And we know that God wants us to be molded. He wants us to be reshaped. And many of us have been on the wheel for decades, for a very long time.

And yet we know we are not yet really vessels under honor. We're not really shaped yet thoroughly into the image of Christ. And that being so, you know, we long to be and we're not there yet.

But it was not up to the clay to decide when the changes would come. The clay had actually nothing to do with it. The clay had only one responsibility, and that was to remain yielded because the potter supplied all the skill, all the expertise, all the strength.

It was really the potter's work, as we know, Paul said in Ephesians 2, 8 and 9 and 10, where he said, By grace you've been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Then he said this, For we are his workmanship.

And the word workmanship in the Greek is poema. We get our English word poem from that. It's a creative work.

We are a creative work that God is working on. We're his craft. We're that which is in his hand that he's shaping.

We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which he has ordained that we should walk in. So the work is really God's work to change us. Now, by the way, I don't take this as far as some would, who would say there's absolutely nothing, no role that we play, because I believe the clay does play a role.

It has to be soft. It has to be yielded. It has to be in the potter's hand.

It has to be on his wheel. And there is one area where clay is not like us, and that is that clay never resists in terms of, you know, running from the potter or jumping off the wheel. But the point is, so long as the clay is where it should be and soft and pliable, the potter does all the work, has all the skill, knows where it's going.

And therefore, at those stages when the clay is no longer a brick of clay, but it's not yet anything like a pot either. In the potter's mind, it is. It's good.

It's good like this. It's not finished, but it's good for this point in time, because when it when the potter decides, then it is shaping very quickly into what the potter wants it to become. Every stage in between, if the potter is fully in control, that that piece of clay is good as far as he's concerned.

It's like a child learning to walk. When our little children are toddlers, they don't walk real well, but we're excited to see them walk at all. But once they begin walking a little bit, eventually it's not very long before they walk quite well.

But still, even after a child's been walking for a few years, sometimes they're a little unsure on steps and things like that. And they they do tend to when they're running trip more often or something, they're not as agile as we hope they will be. But we're satisfied to see that they have reached this stage because we know that's the stage they should be at.

Now, if they don't walk any better than a toddler when they're 17 years old, we will be very concerned that there's something wrong. But at two years old or 18 months or three years old, if they walk like a child that age, we say, well, that's great. That's good.

It isn't good for a 17 year old to walk that way, but it's good for a two year old to walk that way. And every stage that God brings us to is good in itself because it's a work of God. It may not be a place to camp out.

It may not be a place to stay forever because we know we're not yet fully like Christ. But it is good for the time being. If it were not, it is God in God's power to bring the next change.

As in Genesis chapter one, every time God brought a change, it was an increment toward the final goal. It was not the final goal until the sixth day. But each day it was good anyway.

Now, the thing I really want to focus on and the true significant parallel between Genesis one, the pattern of creation compared with the new creation in the believer, is that every change that was made was made through the agency of what? The word of God, of course. It's interesting that the Holy Spirit was said to be present before any changes occurred. The earth was formless and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Holy Spirit was there brooding, but nothing changed.

The mere presence of the Holy Spirit did not change anything. Change came, of course, we must assume the Spirit was involved in this, and certainly in our lives the Holy Spirit is the main active agent. But merely the fact that the Spirit was there didn't bring about all those things God wanted.

There was another agency. That agency was called the word of God. And we see every day in the creation story, God said, let such and such happen, let such and such be, let there be light.

Let there be a division between, called the firmament, between the waters above and below the firmament. Let dry land appear, let the earth abound with fruit, and let the seas team with animals, and let the sun and the moon and the stars and so forth come. Everything that happened, happened because God said so.

Now, this tells us something about God's word, and that is this, that although we have words also, we speak, and that's one of the ways in which we are in the image of God, is that we are rational beings who can communicate verbally. We do not know of any other creatures in the universe that can communicate rational thought verbally. I'm not denying, of course, that animals can communicate with certain sounds, certain emotions and warnings and so forth, but to communicate rational thoughts, to transmit them from generation to generation verbally, is something in man that we do not know of any other created being in the universe, except angels of course, that can do that.

But God is that way, and in the fact that we speak, that is one of the characteristics of being in the image of God that we have. But although there's an analogy to our speaking and God speaking, there's also a disparity. It's not the same.

When we speak, we convey information merely. We expose what's on our mind merely. Now, when God speaks, he also does that.

He conveys information. He reveals what's on his mind. But his word has other dynamics to it that ours do not.

For example, God can say, let something exist, and all of a sudden it does. Now, we are creative beings too. God made us creative.

We can create songs and pieces of art, and we can invent machines. And I mean, that's again, an area of likeness to God that the animals don't share with us. Beavers can build dams and birds can build nests, but they're not creative.

They do it the same way, generation after generation. It's not creativity, it's instinct. Man, however, can create and invent.

And that is something of the image of God. But man does not invent by simply speaking. God's word has a feature about it that ours does not.

And that is what, I guess, what the theologians call God's creative fiat. It doesn't have anything to do with who the maker of his chariot was. It has to do with the fact that he can give a command, and reality changes because of that command.

His word has supernatural power. And this being so, allows him to speak things into existence. Now, I know there's a whole lot of people out there, especially word of faith people, who feel that we have that same power, and that that is part of our birthright as Christians, that we can speak things into existence.

Well, we can speak some things into existence, like we can hurt feelings into existence. We can speak deception into existence. But those aren't tangible things.

We don't speak worlds into existence. We don't say, let there be a house on this spot. And there is.

We have to arduously build a house or hire someone to do it. We don't have a creative fiat like God does. Now, the fact that God does, that God can speak and the universe flies into existence out of nothing, has its analogy in what he does in us, in bringing us into his image.

His word spoken to us has a supernatural power to create in us things that were not there, to enable us to be what we were not, to transform us into something else. We have talked about transformation in an earlier lecture in this series. In fact, one of the few verses that uses this Greek word in the New Testament, I mentioned earlier tonight, when Paul says we are changed from glory to glory into the same image, that word changed, metamorpholo, is used only in two other connections in the New Testament.

One is in the Gospels where it speaks of the transfiguration. When Jesus was transfigured before three of his disciples on the Mount, that transformation is in two of the Gospels, the verb is used metamorpholo, which means to be metamorphosized. When he took on that glorious aspect, when his face shined like the sun and his clothes glistened pure white.

And then, of course, that phenomenon passed and he just looked like himself again. But during that time where there's a supernatural change in his whole appearance, the word that is used by two of the Gospel writers is that he was transfigured or metamorphosized. It's the same Greek word used in 2 Corinthians 3.18 where Paul says we are changed, metamorphosized from glory to glory into that image.

And it's used only in one other place in the New Testament, and that's in Romans 12.2, which says do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed. Again, the same word metamorphosized, be transformed. But he says this, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Now, how is your mind renewed? It is renewed by the introduction of a totally new

mindset, totally new perception, totally new values. I mean, what is your mind? Remember, the mind is not the same thing as the brain. There no doubt is a connection between the physical organ called the brain and the nonphysical entity we call the mind.

What that connection is, I don't think scientists have ever really been able to sort out, and I don't know if they will. But the fact is, changing the mind doesn't necessarily have anything to do with what happens to the organ called your brain. Your mind is your personality, your mind is your beliefs, your values, your perception, your opinions, who you are.

That's your mind. Now, that's to be transformed. You're supposed to be metamorphosized by the renewing of your mind.

And how are your perceptions and your opinions and your values and your thoughts transformed? But through the word of God. You see, the word of God tells us things that we could not otherwise know, because only God knows them until he tells us. And once he has told us, they become for us the foundation of a new way of looking at everything.

We would have some moral sense, possibly, if we were never exposed to the Bible. But we would never be able to trust that our moral opinions were really absolutely trustworthy. Since there are other people whose moral opinions are different than ours.

But when we read in the scripture, such and such is wrong, such and such is right, suddenly we have an absolute standard. And as we conform our thinking to God's thoughts on this, our thinking is transformed. But we are our mind is being renewed.

You should assume that when you come to Christ, when you came to Christ the first time. Out of the world, if you'd been a non-Christian for any period of time before you became a Christian. You should assume that when you came to Christ, everything you believed was probably wrong.

Now, I say probably because unbelievers aren't wrong about everything. Some things are so self-evident that a thinking and perceptive person can figure it out without the word of God to tell him so. But generally speaking, we must assume that if our general attitudes and all were formed before we were Christians.

They were formed in the dark. And it was not until the light of the word of God comes that lets us know what really is true. What really is right, whatever, what is pure and commendable and so forth.

And as we adopt what God has said in his word, it renews our thinking. We get a new way of thinking. Remember when God said in Isaiah 55, my thoughts are not your thoughts.

My ways are not your ways. As high as the heaven is above the earth, so high are my

thoughts above your thoughts. And my ways above your ways.

My children quote that verse better than I can. But the fact of the matter is that God indicated that man has a kind of thinking. And God has a kind of thinking.

And God's way is better, far superior. In fact, that same passage in the verses preceding it are there to advocate that we exchange our way of thinking for his. Because he says, let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man, his thoughts.

And then it goes on to say, because God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than ours. Our thoughts and our ways are wicked. Originally, but as we become aware of God's ways and his thoughts and we adopt them as our own.

We are renewed in our thinking. Our mind is renewed. And this is the arena where the change in character takes place.

As we adopt what God has said as true. At the expense of what we formerly thought on the same subject. We grow.

And in the early creation in Genesis chapter 1, God said, let something happen. And that something replaced what was there before. What was there before? Darkness.

God said, let there be light. Now what was there? Light. It intruded in, crowded out what was there before.

As God speaks to us on any subject. And if we're listening and if we read the word of God, we'll find that he speaks on almost every subject you'd ever need to wonder about. You will find times in the rest of your life to replace what you thought on a subject with what God actually says on the subject.

This yielding to the word of God day by day, month by month, year by year is going to be one of the principal things that determines your growth in character, your change of character. You know, I grew up under the preaching of a pastor who liked to like to extol the beauties of heaven. And make us homesick for heaven.

And one of the ways he sought to do so was to say it this way. He said, you know, when Jesus went away, he said, I'm going to prepare a place for you. And if I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself.

And the preacher said it this way. He says, now, God made the heavens, the earth in six days. And it was a beautiful paradise that he made in six days.

And yet Jesus has been gone preparing a place for us for the past 2000 years. And he hasn't come back yet. Just imagine how far superior the new heavens, new earth, how far superior the new creation is to the old.

If God made the old in six days merely and has taken 2000 years so far, he's been working on heaven. Keith Green also incorporated that idea into one of his songs. However, I, I don't think I mean, it's a great preaching illustration, but I don't think that's quite understanding correctly what's going on.

You see, the new creation isn't somewhere away beyond the blue. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The creation is in here.

The creation is the body of Christ, the new creation. And it's true. Jesus has been working 2000 years on this new creation.

Why is it that it has taken 2000 years when it only took six days to make the heavens, the earth? Anyone got any theories about that? Well, I'll tell you, in case you're shy about saying so, in the original creation, the pattern creation, God spoke and nothing was there to resist. He said it and it was so. He commanded and stood fast.

But when he speaks to us. He finds at times. A resistance.

And this takes a little longer unless he's just going to, you know, bulldoze us on down and say, listen, it's going to be with you like it was those six days. I'm tired of waiting for you. God, remember, can he's very patient.

A day is like a thousand years, a thousand years, like a day to him. So it really doesn't seem like a very long time to him, probably, that he's been waiting. But it is, in fact, a lot longer than it took him to make the heavens, the earth.

Not necessarily because the new creation is so much superior to the old, although it may well be. But simply because the word of God came into that darkened universe and God said, let there be light. And there was no resistance like him.

And every time God said something, it came into a place where nothing was resisting. But as soon as man and woman ate of the tree of knowledge, Geneva, that was the first resistance to God. That occurred in the sphere of this creation.

In human experience. And since that time, there's been resistance. Consistently ever since now, of course, when we've been converted, we have at least espoused a change of attitude.

We're not we're determined not to resist. We have determined that we are. That's what repenting did to us.

Instead of resisting as a as a vocation, we now submit to him as a vocation. But even though we have made that change, we've made that decision to submit to God. There are times all of us must confess where what God really is saying to do is not easy or for us to agree to.

Not easy for us to pay the price for. And that being so, we don't progress quite as quickly as we might otherwise. But the word of God, when it comes to us, if received in the same manner.

As in the early creation. Could, I believe, affect those changes rather rapidly. I believe there's probably other reasons why he has been taken 2000 years also.

But the point is, there is a difference there. Now, I want to tell you something about the word of God that you might not have been told before. If you're an evangelical, as I am, you've probably been told that the word of God is true and reliable.

And and you can trust it for everything. And I'm not going to contest that because I believe that myself. But there's there's more to the word of God than that.

Just as I said, you know, unlike our words, which merely convey information, God's word has other dynamics to it. Like can create universes by just verbalizing his desire for there to be one. There's something else about his word that we need to know and that his word is alive.

And that is why we read in John chapter one. Those famous opening lines of that gospel in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. And then it says all things were made through him, not it.

Him, the word, the word of God. Now, John one one just tells us what Genesis one one tells us. God spoke and it was so the word was there.

All things were made through the word. This is stated in the Old Testament, not only in Genesis, but also in the Psalms and Psalm thirty three six. It says, by the word of the Lord were the heavens made and the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

In the same chapter, verse nine, Psalm thirty three nine, it says, for he commanded and it was and it stood and it was so. He spoke and it was so he commanded and it stood fast. And so the Old Testament, not only in Genesis, but elsewhere, reminds us that the word of God was the creative agency through which the creation was made.

But only when we come to John one one are we told that this word was a he, not a it. And the word of God is a living being. And we know that this was most clearly and dynamically and and uniquely manifested to mankind in the incarnation.

When the word became flesh and dwelt among us, we beheld his glory and the word of God, the same word who was the creator lived in a human body among us. But the fact that Jesus was the word living in a human body with skin on. Does not exhaust the whole significance of the word of God being alive, because Jesus said about the words that he spoke something of interest, he said in John six six sixty three, John six sixty three.

Jesus said, the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. Jesus was himself the living word. Incarnate in the flesh, but there's more to it than that.

When Jesus spoke, his actual words were alive, not they weren't alive, they were life. The words I speak to you, he said they are spirit in their life. In John or should be first Peter chapter one and verse twenty three, Peter said that we have been born again, not with corruptible seed, but with incorruptible seed by the word of God, which is alive and abides forever.

The word of God is alive and abides forever. In Hebrews four twelve, the writer of Hebrews tells us the word of God is alive. The King James is quick.

That's just an old English word for alive. The word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than a sword. The word of God is not just sounds when you're hearing my words right now.

My words are nothing else but interruptions in the silence. My words are just sound waves produced by a mechanism, a vocal mechanism in this physical being here. And they are actually, in a sense, physical things, because they're the only reason you can hear what I'm saying is because there's invisibly there's there's a physical reality of waves of sound.

And really, all that my words are, are so many sounds that you have learned to interpret as thoughts. If you were raised in another country, didn't speak English, they'd just be so much noise. It's like a clanging cymbal sounding brass.

It wouldn't make it wouldn't convey information because you would not have learned to associate those sounds with certain ideas. But we have learned to associate certain sounds with certain ideas. And that's all all my words are, are so many sounds.

But when God speaks, it's not just sounds. In fact, sometimes he speaks without a sound. He's spoken to me many times without any interruption in the silence of the room I was in.

But when he speaks, he speaks spirit and life. The word of God is alive, a living entity. Most uniquely and dramatically revealed to us in the person of Jesus.

But continuously active in our lives. In ways that are very important for us to appreciate and to cultivate. This livingness, this quality of being alive of the word of God is often in Scripture compared with a seed.

In fact, a moment ago, I quoted first Peter 123. You were born again, not with corruptible seed, but with incorruptible seed. The word of God that lives and abides forever.

You know the parable of the sower. Jesus and his sower went out to sow and he threw

seed everywhere. And some of the seed fell on ground of one type, some on another type and so forth.

And each different kind of ground produced different product as the seed was received in a different way. Or met with different conditions in the soil. But the seed, he said, is the word of God.

In Luke 8, verse 11 and following, Jesus said the seed is the word of God. And he described how each of these conditions of soil represented conditions of human heart. When the word of God is presented to them.

The heart can receive the word one way or another way. Sometimes fruitfully, sometimes not fruitfully. But the point is that the seed is a good seed in any case.

It is possible for you to hear the word of God and not have the change affected that God would prefer. You say, well I thought the Bible says his word will not return void. And it will accomplish that where to he sent it.

It does in its own way but it may not be his first choice. His word, he always sends out his word in order that we may obey it. We don't always obey it.

And in that sense it doesn't accomplish in every case what he'd like. But it will not accomplish nothing. If we don't obey it, it will accomplish a change in us.

That change will be hardening. Hardening against God. When you hear the word of God, you either receive it profitably or you become hardened against it like harder soil.

And it always accomplishes something. But the important thing is that a seed is a mysterious and wonderful thing. It's a little genetic capsule of life.

It's kind of alive, I guess. It has to die first, Jesus said, before it really produces anything. But it's obviously a living thing.

At least it comes from a living thing and it has in it the power to reproduce the living thing it came from. The word of God is a living thing. It comes from God and has the power to reproduce God's own life in the right kind of soil.

And Peter talks about that in 2 Peter 1, verse 4. He says that we have become partakers of the divine nature through the promises of God, he says. Unto us are given great and precious promises that through these we may become partakers of the divine nature. 2 Peter 1, verses 3 and 4. So that the word of God, like a living seed, carries with it the life of its originator, God himself.

In order to reproduce that life in the right soil, which is what Jesus taught frequently. Many of his parables were about seeds and soil and many of the statements of the New Testament and old. Encourage us to look at this as a metaphor of what the word of God

is.

It says in Proverbs 12, 12. The root of the righteous yields fruit. Now, the righteous person in Proverbs is the man who lives a righteous life.

That's kind of what we're looking at as our aim in developing Christian character is to be righteous. To be people who do what God wants us to do instead of doing what he doesn't want us to do. To be right in the sight of God.

Of course, we are righteous by faith. It's imputed to us. We know this.

It's not enough. I mean, it is for salvation, but it's not for satisfaction. You can be saved merely with imputed righteousness.

But you cannot be satisfied without imparted righteousness. Because God has put a longing in you to be like Jesus. You say, not in me.

Then I say, I wonder about your conversion. Because I don't know that I've ever met anyone who had a convincing testimony of being saved who didn't want to be like Jesus. Want to be more like him.

I think that's one of the things that shows that conversion has occurred. A desire to be like Jesus. It may not be as strong a desire as it should be in some cases.

There could be thorns and thistles in that ground. What were those? What choked out the seed in the case of thorns and thistles? Well, different gospels and different translations render it differently. But in Matthew's gospel, it says, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the seed.

Well, if you got the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches exercising a prominent role in your heart. And there's a very good possibility that your desire to be like Jesus is somewhat choked. But it can't be nonexistent, I think, if you've really been born again.

You do want to be like Jesus. And that seed of his word is that has within it the reproductive potential to impart and to reproduce the life of Jesus in you, in your spirit, in your heart, if it is properly cultivated. Now, when the proverb says the root of the righteous brings forth fruit, it's interesting to note that the fruit of the righteous life is righteous behavior.

But what is the root? You see, when you see somebody who's godly and convincingly and consistently godly, someone that you might say, well, you know, I wish I could be as godly as that person. You are seeing the fruit in their life. You're seeing fruit of God's work.

But what the proverb is telling us, if you see fruit, it's because of what's in the root. It's the root of the righteous that produces this fruit. It's what's in the root.

And the root grows from this seed. And if you see someone who is consistently or more consistently than you living a godly and righteous life, it's likely that the difference is not simply there above ground. There's probably something different in their heart, something.

There's a root there that is yielding this fruit. That root is going to be, in every case, something that is a growth of the word of God that has been received and embraced wholly. Now, all Christians have received the word of God, but not all Christians embrace it adamantly and with great zeal.

When you read Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, 170 something verses. If you read that, you'll notice something if you're paying attention. And that is that whoever wrote that psalm sure was obsessed with the word of God.

Because although it's got more verses in it than any chapter in the Bible. Otherwise, there's only two or three verses in the whole chapter that don't say something about God's word. Different synonyms are used.

It says your laws or your statutes or your testimonies or some or your word. But but almost every verse in Psalm 119 is devoted to praising and extolling the virtues of the word of God. Oh, how I love thy law.

It says it is my meditation day and night. I have more understanding than the ancients because your word is my meditation and so on and so on. Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light into my path.

How wherewithal shall a young man change his way by giving heed thereto according to your word? Every verse, almost with the exception of two or three in that long chapter is praising the word of God. Now, you may have noticed in that chapter, it's an acrostic psalm. It goes through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

And they're actually presented at the heads of each of eight verses. There's eight verses after each letter in the Hebrew alphabet in that psalm. And in the Hebrew Bible, each of those eight verses begin with that letter that heads the group.

So really, you have eight verses beginning with each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. And it is thought that this may have been a teaching device for Hebrew children to teach them the alphabet. That as they learn the alphabet, so they might have samples of how the letter is used.

They memorize these verses. So every time they learn a letter of the alphabet, they memorize eight verses. Now, imagine how that method of education is calculated to instill in children a reverence for the word of God.

Every time they learned a letter of the alphabet, they learned eight verses that told them

how wonderful and how much to be loved and praised and sought is the word of God. And there is a great love for the word of God exhibited in many of those places. David said of the word of God in Psalm 19, he said, More to be desired are they, he means the statutes, laws, ordinances of God, the word of God.

He says, More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold, and sweeter also than honey in the honeycomb. Job said, I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. Jeremiah said, Thy words were found and I did eat them, and thy word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.

These people were obsessed with the word of God. And it showed there was in their heart a root of embracing wholeheartedly the word of God. And from that root there was fruit in their life.

The root of the righteous produces the fruit. You don't become a holy person simply by changing your outward behavior. Real holiness of behavior is a fruit of something deep, something in the heart, something below the surface that can't be seen with the eye, it's in the heart.

And that is the root that produces the fruit. Now, the exciting thing about this, one of the most exciting verses in this whole talk tonight to me, I don't know if it will thrill you like it does me, but I can't read this ever without getting thrilled, is in First Thessalonians, chapter two, and this print is so small I don't know if I can read it. Chapter two and verse 13.

Paul said, For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you welcomed it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. The word of God, when you received it, you embraced it, it has now come to reside in you, and it doesn't just sit around there, it's working in there. The word of God that effectively works in you.

Now, what's so thrilling about that to me, is that I see what kind of work the word of God can do when I read Genesis, chapter one. There's nothing. And the word of God says, let there be something, and it is.

I mean, more than that, the scripture indicates that even the universe once created is held together, moment by moment, by the word of God. It says in Hebrews, chapter one, verse three, that Jesus is upholding all things by the word of his power, which answers the atomic mystery as to what it is that keeps those protons in the nucleus of every atom from repelling each other. Because, you know, like charges repel each other, opposite charges attract each other.

Yet in the atom, every atom, there is a cluster of protons. All of them have a positive

charge, and they cluster in the nucleus. And by all common sense, it seems like they wouldn't cluster, they would repel each other.

They have like electrical charges, but they don't. They hold together. What holds them together against nature? Something that's supernatural, I believe.

Now, of course, a scientist who doesn't have a biblical worldview would certainly think that was a naive and absurd thing. They'd say, I'm invoking the God of the gaps. Well, there are gaps, and there always will be gaps, and God is the right one to invoke there sometimes.

Gaps in our knowledge. We don't know what does it, so we say God does it, right? That's the God of the gaps. Well, you bet.

I'm not ashamed to have a God of the gaps, but he also is not only in the gaps. He fills the universe. But the fact of the matter, there is a gap in terms of rational explanation of why it is that the atoms hold together.

And if they didn't, what would hold together? Nothing. There'd just be one huge universe of atomic fusion, or fission, excuse me. And we would have nothing instantly.

But it says in Hebrews that he upholds all things, or holds all things together. It says in Colossians, in him all things consist, or hold together, in Colossians 1. And his word is that which upholds all things. It says in 2 Peter 3 that that same word which brought the flood and that created all things now sustains the created world.

And so this tremendous power of the word of God, which when God set it to work, was adequate to create a measureless universe. The measurable universe has a diameter. It's said to be 30 billion light years.

30 billion light years is about as far as we can see, I guess. Or can calculate that we can see, or estimate that we can see. But, you know, a light year is a very, very long distance itself.

It's not a measurement of time, but of space. A light year is how far light travels in a year. And it travels at 186,000 miles a second.

And therefore it travels a very large distance in a year. How far? A light year. How else can you say it? And the universe is 30 billion light years across.

And all that happened by God just saying so. Now that is a mighty powerful word, and Paul says that word is at work in you who believe. The word of God that is effectively working in you.

Do you think there's any possibility that it could accomplish what God wants it to accomplish in you? There is. Very promising. Though, is there a possibility it will not? I

think there is a possibility it will not.

But that possibility never has to be realized. We need to know how to respond to the word of God, how to receive it, and how to be changed by it. Just like I said, the clay on the wheel doesn't have to come up with any creativity or any power of its own.

But it does have to be yielded. If it's tough, if it's hardened, if it's been left out too long and it's dried up, even the hands of the potter can't do all that he'd like with it. And in fact, in Jeremiah 18, where Jeremiah went to the house of the potter, that's exactly what he saw.

He saw a potter who was unable to get what he wanted out of a hunk of clay, and so he tossed it aside and tried with something else. And God says, I'm like that potter. Now, what are we supposed to do about the word of God? I mean, it's very promising.

The word of God that created the universe and holds it together is at work effectually in me. That's great. Fantastic.

But how come it doesn't always have the same results in me as it has in some other people? Or in some other people as it has in me? How come there's not some uniform, consistent working that can be seen in all of us at exactly the same rate and with the same success? I think there is a human component. We must respond to the word of God. And I'd like to talk about that under two headings.

I'd like you to look at Romans chapter 6. In Romans chapter 6, I hate to take a verse out of context, especially in such a rich context as this, but I don't have time to discuss the whole chapter. I just want to grab a thought. Verse 17, Paul said, But God bethanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.

Now, notice he says you were slaves to sin. Isn't that the condition we're trying to get out of? I mean, if our character is to be shaped so that we live holy lives and righteous lives, doesn't that involve that we have to get out of bondage? Does that mean that the patterns and bondages of sin in our lives, we've got to get free of that? Well, Paul said to his readers, You were once slaves of sin, but something's changed. Really? What happened? Well, at this point, he only tells what they did.

He says, You obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine. Now, when you hear the word doctrine, perhaps you think, like I used to, of merely theological things. The doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrine of the deity of Jesus, the doctrine of end times, the doctrine of this and the doctrine of that.

That is doctrine, but that's not all there is in doctrine. And it's very mistaken to think that that's what is usually meant in the Bible and doctrine is spoken of. The word doctrine just is a fancier word for what we'd normally call teaching.

The word doctrine is equivalent with the word teaching. So Paul says you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching. Now, obviously, he's thinking about teaching that can be obeyed.

Because as you've obeyed that form of teaching, the Bible has two kinds of material in it. It has statements of truth and it's got imperatives, commands and exhortations and so forth. There are two reactions.

When God tells us that something is true, what should we do with it? Believe it. That's all you can do it. God says this is so OK, I believe it.

That settles it fine. But when he gives an imperative, what am I supposed to do about that? Just believe the imperative. No, I'm supposed to obey it.

You have in the Bible statements of fact about God and about the world and so forth and about all kinds of things, which our response is to believe those facts, those truths that God says. But we also have in the Bible imperatives, commands, exhortations, and our response to those is to obey them. Now, it's clear when Paul says you have obeyed from the heart that form of teaching, the teaching he has in mind is practical imperative type teaching.

He doesn't say and he doesn't mean you have obeyed from the heart that form of Trinity teaching. Well, what is there to obey about the Trinity teaching? I believe it. But what is there to obey about it in itself? It is not a doctrine that is that is obeyed or disobeyed.

It's something you believe or don't believe. That's a different thing. But to show you how Paul uses doctrine more frequently, it seems to me.

Turn briefly over to Titus chapter two, verse one, and the following verses real quickly. I'm not going to expound these verses. I just want to illustrate something.

Titus two one Paul says, but as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. The Trinity, the deity of Christ, justification by faith and times. No, here's what he calls sound doctrine.

Verse two, that older men should be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith and love and patience. The older women, likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderous, not given too much wine, teachers of good things, that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, love their children, be discreet, keep as home. This is doctrine.

This is what Paul calls sound doctrine, telling people to be sober, telling people to love their husbands, to love their children, telling the older women to teach their. This is what Paul calls sound doctrine. It's not theological affirmations.

It's lifestyle teaching. It's teaching about how to live. That's what Paul's calling sound doctrine.

Now, when he says to the Romans, you were slaves to sin, but thank God you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, that form of teaching. To which you were delivered. I'd like to focus just for a moment on the phrase that form of teaching.

The word form there is a word used frequently in the scripture, but translated differently. It's tupos in the Greek. It is the word from which we get the English word type.

When you read in Christians or hear Christians talk about this is a type of that, you know, Adam was a type of Christ or Isaac was a type of Christ and, you know, Rebecca was a type of the church and so forth. The word type there is being used in the sense that the Bible uses the word tupos. It's the Greek equivalent of type.

And it literally means a mold or a pattern. If you look up this word in, say, vines or somewhere like that, you would find it. Tupos in the Greek meant a mold into which molten stuff was poured.

In order for it to harden like a jello mold. With a jello mold, you pour liquid jello in and after a while you can take off the mold and it holds its shape. Or those who are in that's a good domestic illustration for the women, for the men.

If you're pouring a slab of concrete, you build a frame out of two by fours, right? You hammer it together, but not too tight because it's only temporary. You build a frame and that frame defines the dimensions and the shape that that slab will be. Then you pour in the wet cement and before very long that wet cement isn't wet anymore.

It's hard. You can kick away the form and it's and it holds its shape. That is what the word tupos refers to a mold or a pattern like that.

Now, Paul says you were slaves of sin, but you have gotten out of it by doing this. Obeying from the heart that form, that mold of teaching to which you were delivered. The wet cement is delivered to a mold.

Eventually, that cement holds the shape with or without the mold. But at first it doesn't. At first it needs that mold to define its shape and its size and what it's going to look like.

The practical teaching of Scripture, do this, do that. The commands and expectations of Scripture, they create a mold or a frame of what Christian character is going to look like. And how does it work? Well, I I obey from the heart that teaching.

God says, do such and such. And I really would rather do something else, but I'm a Christian now and I will obey what God says. So I begin to build a habit of obedience to what God has taught.

At first it may be somewhat merely outward. But as I do it and God then pours the grace into that mold of obedience, eventually my character takes that shape and the mold is not needed anymore. It's like in the Old Testament.

God had to control life strictly without word mold of the law and external framework of the law. But now he writes the law in our inward parts. The law is still for the lawless.

Paul said that Timothy Paul said the law is not for a righteous man, but for a lawless man. Well, in some areas, Christians are still lawless, although God has written his law in our hearts. We're not perfect yet.

And there are still areas of our life where we would, if left to ourselves and doing our own way, would be disobedient to God. We do something different than what God wants us to do. We exhibit that all the time in our lives.

It is still, in many respects, not natural for us to do everything the way God wants it done. In that respect, we're lawless and we need a mold. We need something to hold us in with certain parameters.

Now, some people say, well, it sounds to me like you're saying that righteousness is built from the outside in. No, there is a mold. And our obedience to that mold gives shape to our final character.

But what did Paul say? You have obeyed from the heart. You didn't obey legalistically. You obey because your heart is changed.

You have a new heart. And that heart says, I want to obey God. That's where righteousness begins, having the root of a heart that is submitted to God.

And because it is submitted to God, it says, I will obey him. And as I build habits of obedience, then my very character takes the shape of those habits eventually. Now, to give you an example, my nature, even after conversion, might be toward laziness.

But the Bible indicates that laziness is an evil. The slothful man is the worst conceivable person in the book of Proverbs. And we're to be diligent and so forth.

And so the Bible commands me not to be slothful, be diligent. Well, but I'm naturally kind of slothful. Even after I'm a Christian, there's some area of slothfulness there that still asserts itself.

But if I say, OK, I want to change in this area, I will obey from my heart the commands of Scripture that I be diligent. Therefore, I'm going to deprive myself of all those soft choices I'm inclined to make. Instead of hitting the snooze button four times before I get up, I bet I'm going to get up the first time the alarm goes off.

It's uncomfortable. But I want to shape habits of diligence. And and I begin to, out of

obedience to God's word, begin to take on habits of diligence in this case.

And eventually I'm not I'm not planning to change myself. I'm doing the outward thing. I expect God to do the inward thing.

Remember what it says in in Philippians 2, 13, it says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you. Notice you work the outward. You obey what God said.

God works the inward. You can't do that. The best you can do by being outwardly obedient is give God something to honor that you build a framework of obedience for him to pour cement into the grace of God.

That becomes grace in your character. That becomes obedience of a heart. But there is something you must do.

And if you don't do it, it doesn't get done. Have you ever noticed that some Christians never change in some areas of their life? Is it that God doesn't want them to change? Is it that there is inadequate resource available to them to change or is it that they're neglecting to do something? In most cases, they are neglecting one thing, and that is they're neglecting to obey God. They have not made it a habit of obedience.

Habits form character. Your life is being fashioned by your decisions and your consistent decisions that way form habits. It says in Jeremiah.

Chapter 13, verse 23, cannot an Ethiopian changes skin or leopard changes spots. If so, then perhaps you can learn to do righteousness who are accustomed to doing evil. Notice you've got habits.

You're accustomed to doing the wrong thing. And in those days before the grace of God was given before the Holy Spirit was given to affect these changes, they couldn't change. Their habits that they were set in cement.

They couldn't change their behavior consistently anymore than a leopard could change his spots. But habits do form character. But the word of God can transform character.

But it does so by forming a new habit, a habit of obeying what God said. Now, some people have said, well, isn't that kind of being hypocritical? If you really are a lazy person, but you outwardly act diligent. I mean, isn't that kind of what the Pharisees did? Weren't they hypocrites? Weren't they outwardly like whitewashed tombs, but full of dead men's bones? There's a difference.

Hypocrisy is when a person is content to be unrighteous, but wants everyone else to think they're righteous. I'm not advocating that. I'm not advocating that you pretend to be something you're not.

I'm advocating that you because you do desire to be righteous, you cooperate with God and set patterns in your life of obedience to him for him to honor by bringing about the necessary change. You work it out. He works in you.

He does the inward working. His word is working in you. And you are working the outward.

God's word will never force you to obey. God's word commands you to obey, but you are the one who decides to obey or not. If you begin to obey the word of God as a consistent pattern, you'd be amazed.

Your character changes. God, you're building the frame. God puts in the cement.

It's God's work, not yours. Isn't that what Paul said? We said you should put on the new man and put off the old man. Is that a put on? Are you putting people on when you do that? Are you? Are you being a hypocrite? No, it's what we're told to do.

I mean, think about it this way for a moment. I'm out of time here. But if a person is struggling with lustful thoughts, should he think himself a hypocrite if he against his inclinations puts on habits of celibacy because the Bible says to be Does the fact that he's got roaring temptations inside to be other than celibate, does that provide some argument for him to just go out and ventilate what his temptations are? Of course not.

The law is there for the lawless. If your heart is lawless, you need the law to keep you within boundaries. But it's not for a righteous man.

Once your heart is no longer lawless, once your heart is conformed, then you don't need laws to keep you in the boundaries. You stay there by nature. The word of God provides the working power inside as well as the framework on the outside.

And as we obey from the heart, that form of biblical teaching is given to us to which we are committed. That is how the change from bondage to sinful habits to the natural expression of righteousness and holiness in life happens. Now, there was another thing I wanted to get into.

You can see it on the notes. And that was how to cultivate the word of God. There are scriptures there.

And I wish I could preach these. I actually do on a different tape in the series Authority of Scripture. There's a whole tape with this title, Cultivation of the Word of God.

And I go through these points in detail. But the point here is that we need to respond to the word of God a certain way for it to produce fruit. The fact that the seed that is thrown on the soil is a good seed does not guarantee that there will be good fruit because the condition of the soil is a factor as well.

Hard soil, thorny soil, good soil makes a big difference. The seed is the same seed in every case. But the result is not always the same.

And therefore, we must receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James said in James 121. In addition to receiving it, we must mix it with faith.

According to Hebrews 4 to the gospels preached to us as it was to them. But the word preached did not profit them not being mixed with faith and then it hurt it. When you receive it, you must also set your faith upon it and believe it.

You also need to meditate day and night upon it. As the man who produces fruit in Psalm 1 is what the man who his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law, he does meditate day and night. I'd love to preach on that tonight, but I'm out of time.

We have to also obey it. Jesus said in John 1317, if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Or as James put it in James 122, be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own hearts.

And also you need to become involved in teaching it and disseminating it. The writer of Hebrews complained that his readers for the time you ought to be teachers. He said, you have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God.

They should have been teachers by now. Now, this is the full cycle of how the word of God works in you. You receive it like an implanted word.

You believe that you mix it with faith. You meditate day and night on it. So that it's riches are absorbed into your life as you meditate.

You begin to see the riches of the word of God and how they apply to your life. You obey it. And then, of course, the last step is to become one who plants it in others, who sows the seed so that the cycle goes on.

But once you've come to that point, once you've done these things, then the work of the seed grows in you. If your heart is good soil and you receive it, water it with faith and meditation and obey it and teach others, then you will find that the word of God is a powerful and living word. The words are spirit in their life.

And they are the same word that created the universe. And they can create, the word of God can create a new creation in the image of God in those who receive it in this manner. Well, I'm going to have to stop there.