

Eph 4: 13-15 God's Highest Thought
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We spent the past several weeks talking about the nature and experience of the cross of Christ as it works in us in a series that I called "A Crucified Life". This week I'd like to pick back up in our study of the book of Ephesians. We're in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 13 through 15. I'd like to just read these verses to begin.

***Eph 4:13** till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; **14** that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, **15** but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—*

This is one of those areas of Scripture that I revisit often in my mind. It's really one of the clearest purpose statements in the entire Bible. In just a few sentences, Paul tells us the eternal plan and purpose of God. And that plan is centered in the glorification of God through a people who bear the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Why did God create? What was His purpose? What was His highest thought for a creation? There are a multitude of man-centered views that focus on the perceived benefits that man receives through our involvement with God's purpose. And certainly God has loved us beyond measure and has lavished Himself upon us. There is no question about that. But at the center of all that God has done is His righteous and good desire to have a creation that is filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

The redeemed souls of humanity are that creation – *not* the earth, *not* a new earth, *not* any planet, place, or thing. The glory of God cannot fill a place, or a city, or a mountain. Every place, city, temple, house, and mountain mentioned in Scripture as the dwelling place of God is representative of the only habitation in which God CAN abide and fill with His glory, nature, life, and truth. The new creation in which God dwells and is glorified and reigns and rules and teaches and conforms and shines His light...is the corporate souls of those who have been newly created in Christ Jesus. This is where heaven and earth have come together. This is not a relationship where heaven and earth are separated by a veil, divided from one another as in the Old Covenant. This is a relationship where heaven and earth have joined together in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells.

The chief end towards which God has steered all things, the highest thought that God has for you and I, is that we would be the very habitation of God wherein He is glorified. And He is glorified in a very specific way. He is not glorified just by having a habitation. He is not glorified simply by redeeming us as His house. No, God is glorified when we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. God is glorified in His saints when we grow up in all things into Him who is the head,

even Christ. This reality has been on my mind for several weeks. I guess since the beginning of June.

Most of you know I was out of town this past week. One of the things I did when I was in Michigan was visit my grandmother who stays at an assisted living facility near my parents. She's a very sweet woman, my grandmother, and I've always liked her. She's 89 years old and her husband, my grandfather, just passed away a year or two ago. And as is often the case with couples that have been married their entire lives, you get the sense when you talk to her that she's almost just waiting to join him. She doesn't do a whole lot. Part of that is physical limitations, and part of it is her choice.

Anyway, I brought my youngest daughter Willow with me to see her and we sat for a while and just chatted. At one point she said to me "Jason, life goes very fast until you're my age, and then it seems to go incredibly slow". And I said "why do you think that is?" And she said, more or less, that there was just nothing left to do. Everything is done for her. Now everything is either already in the past, or because of her age, is now out of reach. And she gave me some examples.

Now I love my grandmother, and she's sweet and kind, and I don't mean anything I'm about to say to be directed at her or any individual for that matter...but rather just at us. I'm talking about people in general. People who follow the leader, generation after generation, trying to make life into something meaningful. People like me and you who live in these bodies for a relatively puny period of time and seek with all of our energy to **make our life worthwhile rather than discovering Who life is, and what that means about purpose.**

And that's what I was thinking about when I was talking with my grandmother. I was thinking that, in one way or another, we are always trying our best to make natural life meaningful. And we have an unlimited number of ways that we try to do that. And I realize that it might sound a little strange to be thinking this way while visiting my grandmother, but these are the kinds of thoughts that race in my head whenever I talk with somebody really old, or go to a funeral, or hear about somebody passing away. It's an automatic thing with me.

Everyone, in one way or another, labors intensely to make their life meaningful. And yet, if you can hear what I mean by this, **time doesn't really ever allow anything in the natural world to be truly meaningful. Time is always taking things from us.** I suppose it was set up that way intentionally. I'm not trying to depress you. I'm trying to wake up with you.

People give their entire lives to a career that, though it pays bills and supports needs, sooner or later its over, along with the relationships and skills and reputation you leave behind. Some make life about raising children or about visiting places or learning things. I don't need to go down the entire list. And this is all somewhat of a no-brainer...but the point I'm trying to make is that time takes it all from you eventually. **We live in a world where nothing is truly possessed inwardly, and everything that is possessed outwardly is only possessed for a time.** And just as sure as time let you experience it, time is about to take it away...and leave you with only the memory of a time.

And we all sort of just ignore this reality as we reach, over and over again, for more temporary experiences and un-possessable goals. Of course, we say things like

“we’re making memories” instead of saying “we’re constantly losing things to time”. The former sounds much more positive.

So while I was sitting with grandma the thought came to me once again that the only way to redeem time is to use it to gain something eternal. The only way to use time wisely is to seek, in time, something inward and everlasting. And though this specific verse in Ephesians chapter 4 didn’t come to my mind at that moment, the basic concept did. The reality of purpose, what that purpose is, and how it works. The reality of it stung my heart, and just sort of ached for several days.

I always say something a bit like this after going on vacation for a week or so, it has become something of a tradition around here, but I think it’s a good thing that I say it. Its definitely good for me. It is so easy to lose sight of...or never gain a sight of...something more real than the many things that time takes from us. I remember saying one time that about the only way you can fight against time is with a camera. But that doesn’t really capture anything either. I like pictures, but they are just clearer memories.

So, in the midst of the many and different purposes and ideas and plans of man and the multitude of ways that we try to give meaning to our life, in the midst of all of this there stands the eternal, unmovable, purpose of God. It’s always there, hidden from the natural eye, but revealed to whoever is interested. It’s revealed to whoever wants to face it. It doesn’t exactly give more meaning to **our** life, but it involves the discovery of **His** life, and there is the meaning and purpose for everything.

God created you and I, and gave us seventy-five years on planet earth, in hope that we would look for, receive, discover, and grow in, the life of God that is imparted to the human soul in the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul says it like this to the people of Athens,

***Acts 17:26** And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, **27** so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;*

But the problem is, or at least one of the churches great problems, is that we have imagined a purpose for creation that falls so short and means so little that we are almost driven to look beyond Christ, outside of Christ, and into the earth to find something more meaningful. In other words, we have such a puny and pathetic understanding of the “hope of our calling”, and the “unsearchable riches of Christ”....we have such a poor and dim concept of what is available to the soul as a partaker of Christ that we look back, like Lot’s wife, to find a home and purpose and meaning in the realm and life that we have supposedly left behind.

I believe it is with this very thing in mind that Jesus told men and women to sell all that they have, give the money to the poor, and follow Him. It wasn’t that Jesus was against possessions. Its just that He knew where these people had found the meaning of life. And He meant to show them that, though they professed zeal for God, they really had no intention of finding their meaning in Him.

What is your expectation for salvation? In other words, what do you expect to happen with you, in you, to you, now that you have been born of God's Spirit? And I'm speaking specifically now of the time prior to the death of your body. Why has God transferred your soul out from the kingdom of darkness and made it to dwell in the Son of His love?

Much of the church would have us believe that repentance unto new birth IS the eternal plan and purpose of God. God just wants everyone to get "saved". "Hey, did you hear?...Billy got saved! Now that we got him saved, lets try to get Bobby saved."

What's wrong with that? Well, there is absolutely nothing wrong with new birth. The greatness and necessity and miracle of new birth is beyond describing. But new birth is not God's purpose. You are born again FOR a purpose.

If you told me that you and your spouse had become pregnant and were expecting a baby, I would be happy for you both and excited about the baby. But if you were then to tell me that immediately after the excitement and experience of birth, you had no intention of raising the child, but rather were planning on putting it in a dark room alone with its imagination, I would rather quickly cease to be excited for you or the baby. In fact, what started out sounding like something to be celebrated would have quickly become a tragedy to be mourned. Why? Because purpose is not found in giving birth to a baby. **We give birth to babies so that there is now a human that can grow up into purpose.** I'm speaking in natural terms here, not spiritual. Humans give birth to babies so that we can raise them up into the fullness of natural life and potential and reality.

I very rarely, if ever, make comments on the state of our society...but I'll make an exception right now only because of how it parallels spiritual reality. We see, in the world today...and I suppose this has been present in every generation to varying degrees...but we see young women getting pregnant because it seems like a neat idea. Or because it makes them feel mature. Or because there is government assistance for single moms and they want to get a place of their own. Whatever the reason, pregnancy and birth have, with some, **become a means to an end OTHER THAN raising a child into the fullness of human life and potential.** People are having babies without looking beyond the birth. People are having babies without considering the purpose that extends far beyond birth...and only giving themselves to their children inasmuch as their interest and time allows.

And what is the result? Well, the result is often the ruin and corruption of a natural life. It's horrible that humans have the ability to do this to one another, but birth is not an end in itself. Birth is a beginning. And with birth comes the potential for growth and maturity...along with the potential for carelessness and immaturity and stunted growth.

And I mention all of this because of the obvious parallels in spiritual life. New birth is unarguably essential and wonderful. But new birth is the beginning of a process and a purpose that so many of us happily ignore. We are often content with new birth because that is where OUR interest in God ends. We will march and vote against teen pregnancy because we know what often happens to life that is conceived without a view to natural purpose. But we think very little about the potential and purpose for the life of God that resides in the soul of man. And of course we take

our stand against abortion, but we're far less protective of the life and potential that exists as the seed of God in the human heart.

Once we are born again, we believe ourselves to be safe from hell, our lives are protected, and we can read books, study doctrines, and serve a church as our interest and time allows. But very rarely does man consider God's desire to have a habitation, a land, a city, a temple, all of which amounts to a people, in whom He forms the very life of His Son and is thereby glorified. And even more rare is the willingness to allow Him to work that purpose in our soul by way of the cross.

And that brings us back to our verses for today. That brings us back to the consideration of God's purpose to have a people who are attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. A people in whom He is glorified. This is God's all-consuming purpose. And if we will turn our hearts to know the Lord as the Spirit makes Him known, then this purpose begins to consume us as well.

I just want to say a few things about each of these verses specifically, and then we'll close. Paul says "till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." When he says "till", that doesn't mean that he has a literal day or time in mind. This is not a prophecy about a past or future calendar event. This is a statement of purpose. This is a goal statement. Everything works towards this end. This is the end that God has in mind – that all who are in Him would grow up in Him. That the ones in whom Christ dwells would have Christ formed in them unto His full measure. That we would constantly journey towards God's expected end, the true land of glory that God saw from the beginning.

People have asked me "do you think we're going to be part of that generation that comes to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God?". The answer is no. This isn't a Scripture that describes a natural generation of people in a specific time. This is a Scripture that describes the ultimate intention of God for all people of every generation and time.

Verse 14 talks about no longer being tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. A few weeks ago I said a few things about doctrines. I won't repeat all of that. But I will say that the reason that Christians are blown to and fro by doctrines is **because we still think that knowing true doctrines is the same as knowing the truth**. There was a long period of time in my life where I was afraid of believing something false. I was a bit anxious that, perhaps, I had the wrong idea about this or that, or that I had been deceived by errant teaching. I realized some years later that the only reason that fear existed in me was because of a foundational misunderstanding of what the truth is and why God wants me to know it.

The truth is not words, and its not doctrines. The truth can be described by words, but it will never be learned **as** words. The truth is a Person who is only known when His life is revealed in your soul. This reality is so foreign to the mind of man. Sadly, it is foreign to many in the body of Christ. Truth is not words. In a similar way I could say that Jessie, my wife, is not words. Now nobody would argue with me about that. Words can do a good job, or a bad job, describing Jessie. But nobody in their right mind would suggest to me that Jessie was the words that described her. Can you hear what I'm saying?

We act like knowing Christ is believing the right words about Him. We act like God is known through doctrines. And then, naturally, we suppose that finding the right doctrines is finding God. And guarding the right doctrines is protecting God. And exposing the wrong doctrines is fighting for God. And loving the right doctrines is loving God. You see, there is something very wrong with all of that. God is not words. God is Spirit, and to know Him you must know Him in Spirit and Truth. And you must know Him where He is and in the way that He is related to you.

In simple terms, knowing God is not an awareness of true words, but an experience of His eternal Spirit as the life that has been given to your soul. The Spirit of God "takes the deep things of God and reveals them to you"...then, and only then, can you understand the doctrines that were written to describe Him. You know Him as Life and Spirit and Truth...then the words about Him confirm and explain your relationship. But it doesn't work the other way around.

So, it is only when we are not rooted and grounded in the reality of what God has given to the soul in the PERSON of Jesus Christ that we are blown to and fro by doctrines that attract us or frighten us. Not knowing the truth, we are blown by true doctrines and false doctrines. "Wow, that sounds right. That's better than what I used to believe, and has seven verses to support it! From now on, I'm going to believe that". Or "Oooh, that sounds wrong. I don't think that's in the Bible. My pastor never mentioned that. I'm not going to believe that!" Ok....congratulations. So what? Can you see that both of these scenarios don't really mean anything? You're not supposed to just believe in the truth. You're suppose to experience it, live it, know it, abide in it. It's suppose to be an encounter with a Person, not a relationship with words.

Sometimes people ask me "so Jason, do you believe in this doctrine or that doctrine?" Or "do you line up more with this Christian writer or with that Christian writer?" And I'm always tempted to say "You know what?...it doesn't really matter what I think". But, whenever I say that, then they always say "of course it matters, because one is the truth and the other is the lie". And then I feel compelled to say "no, actually Christ is the truth and you are the lie". And that always goes down like a rat sandwich.

Seriously though...in one sense, it doesn't really matter what I think about truth. It matters whether truth, as the experience of God's reality in Christ, is becoming the reality that defines my mind, my emotions, and my will. **I'm not looking to find true words and establish good theology. Truth is looking to find room in my heart to establish the kingdom of God in my soul.** And to the extent that the Truth Himself reigns in your soul over every high thought and imagination that rises up against the knowledge of God...to that extent you are anchored in reality, and unable to be blown around by doctrines, or anything else for that matter.

Now, in Paul's day, I understand that the historical setting for this verse was the false teachers and apostles coming through town teaching this or that new idea or promoting this or that missing piece. But...really, how is that any different than what's going on today? I would bet that we have far more of that exact situation than Paul saw in his own day. Books, conferences, magazines, radio and T.V. broadcasts. More spiritual ideas and doctrines than you could shake a stick at. How do you know which one is the truth? You don't, as long as they remain words. You can't know truth as a doctrine. You can know doctrines that are true, but not truth as a doctrine.

But when true words are presented to the ears, and there is a genuine heart to know the Person that they describe, then the Spirit of God can establish the Person of truth in your soul. And this is what the next verse describes. Paul says "speaking the truth in love, we grow up in all things into Him who is the head, even Christ".

How does speaking the truth to each other cause us to grow up in all things into Him? Certainly not by learning facts and memorizing Scriptures. But rather by presenting to one another the reality of our salvation, and giving the Spirit of God something real to work with.

This is why I consider small groups and meetings to be so essential to growing up in Christ. It's not because I'm trying to replicate the first century house church. It's not because I think we need to share all of our natural struggles or eat brownies together. It's because when two or three people come together in Christ, and begin sharing with one another the reality of that union, the reality of Life and sonship and grace and faith and the cross and the love of God in Christ...when we attempt to speak out from a Spirit-given view of these things with one another, then the Spirit is present to do what He does best and loves most. The Spirit is there to "take the things of Christ and reveal them to you", to "cause you to know the things that have been freely given to you by God".

And beholding Him in that way, we are changed into His image, from glory to glory. Seeing Him, we see who we are in Him...and we grow up into Him in all things. Amen.