

Eph 4: 16-19 The Futility Of The Mind  
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We're going to continue this morning in our study of the book of Ephesians. Last week we talked about growing up into the full measure of the stature of Christ. We talked about God's purpose, His highest thought, for creation – to have a people in whom He is glorified by conformity to the image of His Son. And then we continued into the next verse by discussing what it means to be blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine. As always, if you missed that you can pick it up in the bookstore.

We ended up last week talking about verse 15 where Paul discusses speaking the truth in love, and growing up into Him in all things. That thought continues on into verse 16 where we are going to pick up today. So let me just read the next few verses, and we'll pick right up where we left off.

***Eph 4:16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. **17** This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, **18** having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; **19** who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

Verse 15 and 16 really are one thought. First Paul sets out the goal – that is, the perfect man, the one who is attaining to the measure of the stature of Christ. Then he discusses something of the way that we grow up into that man. He tells us that we speak the truth in love, and grow up into Him who is the head. Then in 16 he tells us that we are knit together by what every joint supplies, causing the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. In both verses, he references this phrase "in love".

I want to start by just reiterating something I said briefly last week. Paul understood something about how spiritual growth works. He understood something that I began to understand only after I came to some comprehension of the importance and reality of the revealing of Christ. What did he understand? He understood that in order for us to grow up together into Christ, in order for us to grow up in the truth and reality of what God has done for us in His Son, we need to present that truth to one another in such a way that the Spirit can use it to reveal the Son of God.

Why do I, or why does anyone, preach the gospel. I mean, I constantly talk about the absolute necessity of the revealing of Christ. This is an inward, personal, spiritual awakening to reality. I am always insisting that our salvation is not words, but rather is an encounter and participation in the resurrection life of the Son of God which only the Spirit can work in the soul. I say, perhaps more than any other thing, that only by the Spirit of Truth working in the heart can a person know the Lord. So why do I preach? Why do we come together and share the view of faith?

I preach, and you share your view of spiritual reality in Christ, because we are a body. More specifically, we are the body of Christ. And, just like the natural bodies we see in the earth, it is not the intention of God to have a foot grow to full stature apart from the leg, or one finger to become a manly finger apart from the hand. A body grows and functions together. **And we, as the Lord's body, are involved in the growth and function of one another.** Just as the life in my feet serves the good of the entire body, or the life in the eye serves the good of the entire body, so we share the reality of life that is working in us with the body to which we are joined for its growth and edification.

What does that look like? Well, I'm NOT talking about natural giftings here. Whenever people read the body metaphors in the New Testament they seem to automatically assume that Paul's understanding of the function of differing members is according to natural giftings. I mean, when we read how Paul says that the eye differs from the foot, we automatically think "yeah, I play the piano, and Susie's got a great voice", or "Billy's a good communicator, but Bobbie is gifted at finances. We all have our roles and they are all important". Sorry if this crushes your sense of importance, but that has relatively nothing to do with what Paul is talking about. **We don't come together and offer one another natural giftings and earthly abilities. We come together and offer each other the measure of Christ that is working in our souls.**

Now, with the measure of Christ working in the soul, there can be outflow in or through natural gifting. **But the gifting itself is not what we are supplying to each other. Your gifting is not what I need. I need the measure of Christ that is working in you.** And frankly, as far as the church goes, I don't really need anything else from you, because the church is something entirely spiritual and eternal. Now don't misunderstand me. As far as the earth goes, I may need you to baby-sit my kids. I may need you to make me a taco or mow my grass. But when we come together in the name of Christ, taco or not, what I need from you is to hear and share your view of the eternal reality that is being shown to you by the Spirit of God. What I need from you is to participate in your experience of the Life of the Son of God. I need to grow up with you into the Him who is the head. I need you to give me whatever measure of Him is operating in you.

Do you see what I'm saying? Last week I joked a bit about how small groups in the past for me were times to share natural problems and baked goods. I was sort of joking, but sort of not. You see, even though it may feel intimate and real, it doesn't really do any good to get together and talk about all of the things in the earth that hurt us. Now listen, I'm not trying to be callous and mean. I have things that hurt me too. I have cataclysmic panic attacks, and bad hips, and bad days, and bad hair days. Actually, I have no-hair days...and that's every day! And even though there are times when it feels really good to get together with you and tell you just how sore my hips might be and the ride that my emotions have taken me on...that doesn't really end anything. That doesn't really cause me to grow. And that certainly doesn't help you at all.

But do you know what does help me? What helps me is when I sit down with you in the midst of my problems and struggles and blindness and pain, and instead of trying to minister to my circumstances, you actually speak realities that bring me up out of them. You speak things that only the Spirit of God can make real in my soul. You speak, not doctrines and ideas and memorized verses....not concepts and applied Christianity...but you speak out from a Spirit-given view of the reality of

being alive with Christ in God. You talk to me about the reality of Christ's death that you are seeing, and how it is working in you. You talk to me about a Scripture that has come alive in your soul. You talk to me about an aspect of the cross that is becoming so real to you and having the effect of crucifying the world to you and you to the world.

Though I may protest this in the moment, I don't really want you to empathize with me, sing Kumbaya, and pass me a brownie. That may sooth my emotions for a minute, but it won't leave me with anything eternal. It won't leave me with a substantial view of the Lord that I can abide in. It will leave me with just enough temporary comfort to come back again next week and hope for a breakthrough.

Why do we come together? **We come together to offer to one another the measure of Christ that is seen in and known by and functioning in our souls. We come together to minister One Life to each part.** I can't literally GIVE you more of Jesus. I often wish that it worked that way. But I can give you MY VIEW of Him. I can share faith with you.

Now for those of you who may be new with us, let me define my terms a bit so that you don't misunderstand. When I say share "my view", I'm not talking about sharing my beliefs. I'm not talking about giving my testimony. It might be a nice story, but I don't really profit much from hearing about how the Lord provided for you financially. I don't really need to know the details of your conversion at the Billy Graham crusade. That's not what I mean by sharing your "view of Him". When I speak of sharing a view of Christ, or sharing faith, I mean very specifically the Spirit-given view, the mind of the Lord, the God-given realization of all that it means to be baptized into His death, raised with Him, seated with Him in His Father. I mean, I want you to do your best to describe to me something that is indescribable. I want you to try to tell me what you saw when the Light shined in your heart to give you the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. I'm talking about the realities you are seeing with the renewed mind.

And if you are seeing nothing in this way, then you have nothing to share with me. And that's ok. Its much better for you and I to sit there and remain silent than to offer people some religious belief. If faith is foreign to me, if I have no present view of the Lord, than I have nothing to offer you except a hug and a prayer. But if you can see Him in a way that is effecting your heart and shaping your soul, then sit down and try to bring me into that Light. Because in that Light, my problem doesn't exist. In that Light, everything, including me, fades into the background.

It is my belief that part, not all – but part, of the reason that we grow so little in the church has to do with the fact that we present to one another so little that represents a true statement of faith. I don't mean a belief statement. I mean statements that come out from faith. I believe that is true in large and small groups. So much of what we speak to one another in the name of Christianity cannot even be used by the Spirit of God to edify the soul. It's like giving a carpenter a bag of marbles and asking him to build a coffee table. Its not the right material.

If you come in here on Sunday and I attempt to offer you any of the popular 5 steps to being a Christian, or 7 keys to finding your potential, or if I give you so-called practical ways to live more like Jesus, or different ways to apply Scriptural principals to your life, family, and business.... or even if I offer you *my* ideas about what a Scripture means and doesn't mean, then I'm really offering you nothing. Worse than

that, I'm give the Spirit of God a bag of marbles and asking Him for form the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The only thing worth sharing with you is the actual reality of Christ that is in my spiritual field of vision, and is presently working in me. And I'm not standing up here pretending I do this perfectly or even know perfectly what this means. But I do know that growing up in Christ is a reality, not a theology. It is something that we experience in our soul when His life occupies and reigns and conforms and constrains. And it is something that the Spirit of God is able to work in us as we hear, and want to know, the truth as it is in Christ. True faith begins with hearing. But it must be a hearing of the living word of God.

So when Paul talks about speaking the truth to one another, and being knit together by each joint supplying the body, he is talking about each of the members of the body of Christ ministering to one another the measure of Christ that they are seeing and coming to comprehend and know and experience. In this way, you can fill up my lack, and I can fill up yours, as we progress toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Now you'll notice that in both 15 and in 16 you'll see this little phrase "in love". Paul says that we are speaking the truth in love, and then that we are being built up in love. I thought I might just say a couple things about this phrase because its one of those things that we automatically assume we know what he's saying, and I'm not so sure that we do. At first glance, when you read that we are to "speak the truth in love" it is generally assumed that Paul is telling us to speak true things in a loving way. Or "say it, but say it nicely". Similarly, in the next verse when we are being "edified in love" it is probably assumed that Christians are to grow up towards a loving disposition, or kindness, etc.

And while I do think that both of those are valid ideas, I honestly don't think that is exactly what Paul is talking about in these verses. I think that Paul's understanding of love here goes beyond niceness or kind speech. I think that he added the phrase "in love" because, to him, love was the nature and reality of our relatedness in Christ. This is difficult for me to describe. Love is the nature of a relationship. Its not just a way to act or feel. Love describes the nature of the relationship that we have with one another because we have lost our lives at the cross and now live in and by the life of Christ. Love, as we have talked about at other times, seeks not its own gain, keeps no records of wrongs, is always patient, etc., PRECISELY because our lives are out of the way, having been lost at the cross.

To the extent that self has been put away through conformity to the death of Christ...only to that extent can we actually relate to one another in love, because wherever self lives, all things are done for self. So love isn't just a nice way to say or do something. Love is a way of relating to one another in Christ where we have no life but Christ. Love is a way of relating where our lives are laid down, and His life that we share is the central reality of all things. Love is the nature of our relationship in Him.

Whenever love is talked about in the Bible, it seems that Jesus or Paul or John are describing something that is absolutely impossible. And, as a matter of fact, that is actually the case. The nature and reality of love that they describe is absolutely impossible for the natural man, and only when, and to the measure that, the natural man has been conformed to death, is this kind of love even an option. The nature of

the adamic man is to seek his own gain. But when that man faces the cross and is conformed to death, then, and only then, can Christians actually relate to one another in love. Only then are we able to really speak to one another in the reality of love. And when the body of Christ is built up, it is built up in that specific relationship.

If that didn't make sense, don't worry about it. Paul moves on from here and contrasts his expectation for the church to grow up into the fullness of Christ with what he desires them to leave behind – specifically the darkness and futility of the natural mind.

“no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart”

I want to say a few things about this darkness and blindness that Paul describes, and then we'll be done. This darkness is probably one of the most underestimated and unrealized realities in the body of Christ. Though very few realize it, the natural mind is, without question, the darkest region in all of creation. It wasn't created to be that way. But it became that way when man believed the lie.

Think about this with me. What is light? In the natural realm, light is the appearance of what is real. Light is what brings us into a view of what is there, what is true, what exists. Spiritual light is very similar. It is not visible to the natural eye, but it is still the appearance of what is real. Spiritual light, which could also be called God's view or God's understanding, brings us into a view of what is there in Christ, and therefore what is not. What is true in Christ, and therefore what is not. And just as natural light does not describe something to you, but shows all things to you.... similarly, spiritual light doesn't describe things to you in words, it simply shows spiritual reality to you. And that is why, when the light of Christ shines in your heart, a million words won't do it justice. And that is also why, when you see Him in the light, it feels like it's the first time you ever read the words.

What then is darkness? Spiritual darkness is the absence of God's view. It is the absence of His light. And so in darkness, absolutely nothing of spiritual reality can be seen or understood. I wish to God that I could say that in a way that would actually sink in to our hearts. In darkness, the darkness of the natural mind, NOTHING of spiritual reality can be seen. **However, much can be imagined.** The mind of the natural man is, by nature, completely devoid of true light. It is a darkness that natural darkness can only testify of. In believing the lie, man became a source unto Himself, a light unto himself, and in-so-doing refused the light of life. Consequently, **apart from the light of life illuminating the soul, absolutely nothing that man thinks or sees or understands is according to truth.** If we would only accept that instead of calling our darkness light.

Man thinks things, believes things, reads things, and teaches things...all the while ASSUMING that truth can be seen in the dark. We don't often realize that that assumption is beneath all of our thinking. We read a book about God, it sounds right, it sounds interesting, we get excited about it, and presume that truth has been seen. But more often than not nothing has been seen, though much has been imagined. We feel guilty before God and somebody tells us that there is no condemnation in Christ. That makes us feel better, and so we're glad we saw the

truth. But we didn't see anything. We just heard something that made us feel better. We read Calvin's Institutes and now feel like we have a better handle on the nature, plan, purpose and ways of God. But what a deception. Man can learn many things without ever seeing in the Light.

How effective is it to study a work of art in a pitch dark room. How effective is it to read a classic novel in a room without light? Nobody would even attempt it. Then why in the world do we seek to know and learn and teach the reality of salvation apart from the light of God showing us who He is and what He has done. **God's book without God's light is a very dangerous thing.** Many people have been ruined when man utilizes God's words without His light. It cannot but be a means to mans end.

Jesus says "if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness". Do we suppose He was speaking only of first century Pharisees? Did he have a specific person in mind? Or do his words describe the entire race of man that sees and walks and judges by a darkness that we call light. Is it possible that our eyes have become so accustomed to the darkness that we actually believe that we can see? Worse than that, is it possible that we actually prefer it that way?

Jesus said

***Joh 3:19** And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

In our verse today, Paul says that man is alienated from God because of the darkness that is in them. But that is not the case because God is far from us, or because He is withholding Himself from us. It is that way because we love darkness, and we safely keep our distance from the light. Why do we love darkness? Because light always tells the truth. Because light always shows us what is real. And the vast majority of humanity would rather live a fantasy that can only exist in darkness, than invite the Light of Life to rain on our parade.

Man loves darkness because our deeds are evil. It's really quite simple. **We love darkness because that is where self can hide in the imagination of self-worth and self-righteousness and self-justification.** Only in darkness can those ideas exist. Light immediately destroys and embarrasses any such notion. Light is a quick witness against such ideas. But, more often than not, if there is a way to avoid the light, we will find it. And we are particularly adept at hiding in our own darkness while condemning others who do the same.

In Ephesians 4, Paul is describing the nations of the world who do not know God, and He is telling the Ephesians that now, in Christ, they are growing up in the Light rather reveling in the darkness. These nations are walking in the darkness of their own mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and blindness of heart. That is true of the unbeliever.

But what I want you to consider this morning, as we close, is that that exact same darkness will continue to work in you and I after we are born again to the measure that we hide in the darkness of the unrenewed mind, and live in the blindness of the natural heart of Adam.

Christians are often wondering why so little has changed in their lives after they are born again. After several years of diligently pursuing God and disciplining my flesh and crying out to Him with prayer and fasting...I wondered that very thing. I wondered why I still had no idea what it meant for a soul to be transformed.

The answer came when I realized that Light is something absolutely foreign to the heart and thoughts of humanity. Light is the view of God that works in the soul when we will acknowledge the futility of our mind. It is one thing to have the life of God residing in the heart. It is another thing altogether to be living and walking in and by the light of that life. Life is granted upon new birth. Transformation of the soul is the work of light.