

Learning Christ pt. 2
Eph 4:20-24
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I spoke last week from Ephesians chapter four about the way that we learn Christ. I want to continue with that same topic today. Let me just begin by reading the passage.

***Eph 4:20** But you have not so learned Christ, **21** if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:*

Last week I attempted to make a distinction between two very different ideas about learning Christ. On the one hand there is the kind of learning where we experience God in an outward sense, and by that I mean we see His creation, we read His words, we witness His miracles, we experience the sense and power of His presence. Even dreams and visions are included in this category. All of this I would put in a category called "outward experience" of God. It is outward because it is not an experience of indwelling life, but rather an encounter with God through creation in one way or another.

The alternative to this, and what I believe to be the only way to truly learn Christ in the way that Paul is describing, is to learn Him **as the life of your soul**. To learn Him, and be taught IN Him, and find Him to be the only life that you have. Unfortunately, the latter of these kinds of learning is not as common as the former. I mean it is not taught or explained or considered as often.

We must understand something about learning. God has given us five senses for learning the natural world. These are the senses that we begin to become familiar with even as babies. Those of you who have had babies have had the pleasure of watching your babies discover their eyesight, or discover different textures for the first time as they feel things with their little fingers. That's pretty neat to watch. These babies have senses that they don't really understand yet. And by using them, they become familiar. By exercising them, they learn to discern the natural realm.

Well, God has given the natural body these five ways of discerning natural reality. We have sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. And all of these are used to discover, operate in, abide in, and know the natural world in which we found ourselves following birth. When you were born, you were found in a creation that was unfamiliar to you. But God gave your body the ability to sense and learn that creation so that you could abide there. Can you see where I'm going with this? Each of these senses was given to us by God so that we could know and live into the good of where we were born.

But what we fail to understand as Christians is that natural senses have their limitations precisely because they are natural. What I mean is that, no matter what sense it is, you are always seeing or hearing or touching something external to

yourself. You are observing and experiencing something that is outside you. It is NOT you. Its not part of you. In fact, not only is it external to yourself, but after we perceive it with our senses, then we also have two more steps before we can really internalize it and learn it. First we *sense* it. Then we have to *understand* what it is that we are sensing. And then we have to make personal *application*. So, for instance, when we see fire, our senses say that it is pretty, and bright, and hot, and smells cozy. But when we touch it, we understand something about it, and then make the application that its not to be touched.

I don't mean to get philosophical here. I'm trying to make a very simple point. My point is that, when we're learning natural things, **we are learning something that is first of all OUTSIDE of ourselves, second of all it leaves you as the one to supply comprehension and make application. And what I'm trying to get at is that, generally speaking, that is how every human being assumes that we come to know God as well. We're so familiar with that way of learning, without even realizing it, we apply that kind of learning to our relationship with God.**

What do I mean? I mean that we see one of His works, and that work is external to ourselves. It doesn't matter what it is, it could be a miracle or it could be the grand canyon. But we see something that God has done outside of our being. And then we are there as the ones who need to try to internalize our experience of God by supplying the understanding of what we have seen, and the application. So, for instance, after we see a friend of ours healed, we say to ourselves "wow I've seen the power of God. This means that God loves people. Therefore God must love me."

Can you see what we've done there? Now I'm not saying that, in that particular case, the conclusions were false. It is certainly true that God DOES love people. But you haven't really learned anything about the love of God. You think you have, but its been *your* natural observation, *your* understanding, and *your* application. And for that very reason, when you see God do something different next time, what you've learned about God might be shaken a bit. Circumstances might make you feel differently about his love. For instance, if next time its *you* that needs to be healed, or one of your children, and God doesn't heal them, well there you are again as the one trying to understand and apply what you are seeing. And this time, your conclusions and application leaves you feeling very unloved.

I say all of that for the simple purpose of making a comparison. Learning Christ is not something that happens through these kinds of experiences. Its not like learning or knowing anything else. Knowing Christ is nothing like knowing your best friend. It's a different kind of learning. A different kind of knowing. You cannot know Him by watching something he does or reading something He says. Both of those things, miracles and true words, certainly CAN point to Him. But knowing Him is something different. Knowing Him takes something called faith.

Faith is to spiritual reality in Christ what senses are to natural realities in the world. If you take sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell....and add them all together, then you have the natural counterpart of one magnificent spiritual sense called faith. Faith is the fulfillment of all natural senses combined. And let me just say again for any new people that faith is not belief. Faith is the soul's perception of spiritual reality, and it accesses and experiences that reality. Faith is the seeing of Him who is unseen, the hearing of Him who speaks from heaven, the tasting of the

goodness of the Lord, the true touching of God, etc. Faith is the spiritual sensation that all natural sensations point to.

And what I'm trying to show you is that, though God has given us this incredible ability to sense spiritual reality through faith, **most of us still try to access the Lord through natural senses. Most of us still try to learn Him and know Him through the five natural senses that are only useful for natural things.** And so we just read his words with our natural eyes. And we try to hear His voice with our natural ears. And we want to feel his touch on our natural skin, or feel Him fixing our natural pains. And we want to taste his goodness in the natural realm. And more than anything, we want to understand Him with the natural mind. And in all of these ways, we think that we are learning Christ. We think that if we experience Him with all of these natural senses then we are knowing the Lord.

Am I saying that God cannot be experienced through the natural five senses? Of course not. God can certainly be *experienced* in and through those five natural senses, but no matter how stunning and impacting the encounter, the impact is UPON you, and it cannot transform your soul or teach you the truth.

Peter experienced this one day with Jesus. We've talked about this several times. He had seen miracles. He had seen healings. He had seen Jesus transfigured before his very eyes. But when He began to perceive and comprehend something of Spiritual reality, Jesus quickly told him that it was revealed to him from the Father. It was given to Him as the reality of faith.

You see, there is a universe of spiritual life and reality called Christ. All spiritual things are known and experienced as they are found in Him. All things that God has given to man are found in Him and by Him and as Him. In Him and as Him is the reality of redemption and truth and love and purpose that is divided from the natural realm by the cross of Jesus Christ. And that reality, that universe, that Life, is accessed and learned by faith, and not by the natural senses that were given to you to operate and abide in the earth.

***Rom 5:1** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **2** through whom also **we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand**, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Unlike natural senses, faith doesn't see something that is outside of yourself. And more than that, it does not leave you there to figure out the understanding or make the application. No, that is how we learn natural things with the much weaker senses of the flesh. **Faith comes complete with all three of these things. Its all part of one package.**

- **First of all, faith sees something that is not outside of yourself, but rather something that is actually the very life within you.**
- **Second, true faith comes with understanding. I mean, the seeing of faith *is* the understanding of the Lord. They are not separated. You don't come up with your own understanding, but through faith you come to participate in His.**
- **And third, the application is made TO YOU, and not made by you.** What faith sees applies itself to your soul because it connects you with what is real, what God has done. It accesses reality and thereby changes everything.

So, you see, faith is a far greater sense in several ways. The gift of faith is the seeing of God face to face in the way that the Old Covenant saints could never do. Moses longed to behold the glory of the Lord but was only allowed to see his back. But Paul tells us that when the light of Christ shines in our heart then we have seen the face of Jesus Christ. Faith is the true seeing of God.

Most often, Christians believe that faith is a believing in God, and one day sight will see Him. But that is not true. Faith is the *true seeing* of God, and sight can never apprehend him. It never could, and it never will. Faith is a far greater view, a far greater apprehension and experience. Sight, in fact, is the dim shadow of faith. **Often our problem is that our experience of faith is so minimal that we suppose faith is the shadow of sight. We want sight to take over from faith, when really faith sees so much more clearly than sight.**

In addition to true seeing, faith is the true hearing of the Lord. This is what we spoke about last week from verse 21 where Paul says "if indeed you have heard Him and been taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus". Can you see that Paul is describing the hearing of faith. The teaching of faith. Spiritual light breaking in upon the soul of man.

Some of you may have heard of Jonathan Edwards. He was a famous puritan preacher and theologian and philosopher in the seventeen-hundreds. He was a naturally brilliant man, and used his intellect to write enough books to fill this room. He is, without question, one of the greatest minds to have ever lived. But he became aware of a different and far greater kind of learning. He once wrote a paper where he described this reality. The article was entitled, "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God"

Jonathan Edwards writes:

There is such a thing as a spiritual and divine light immediately imparted to the soul by God, that is of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means. This spiritual and divine light does not consist in any impression made upon the imagination. It is no impression upon the mind, as though one saw any thing with the bodily eyes: it is no imagination or idea of an outward light or glory, or any beauty of form or countenance, or a visible luster or brightness of any object. It may be thus described: a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising from such a sight of their divine excellency and glory; so that this conviction of their truth is an effect and natural consequence of this sight of their divine glory.

He goes on to say:

It is rational to suppose, that it should be beyond a man's power to obtain this knowledge and light by the mere strength of natural reason; for it is not a thing that belongs to reason, to see the beauty and loveliness of spiritual things; it is not a speculative thing, but depends on the sense of the heart. The perceiving of spiritual beauty and excellency no more belongs to reason, than it belongs to the sense of feeling to perceive colors, or to the power of seeing to perceive the sweetness of food. It is out of reason's province to

perceive the beauty or loveliness of any thing: such a perception does not belong to that faculty.

What Jonathan Edwards describes here is the reality of true faith. The learning of Christ as God grants a spirit-given awareness and perception that is greater than all natural senses combined. And, though perhaps I'm belaboring this point...it is essential to understand that THIS is the learning of Christ that Paul describes in this section of Ephesians. Though God can be experienced in the flesh, God cannot be approached or learned through any natural faculty or through the natural mind. God is only approached by faith, learned by faith, accessed by faith. And the perception of faith is trained and enlarged as God reveals His Son in you.

Hebrews says:

Heb 5:12 *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

Discerning good and evil in this passage is not talking about learning the difference between naughty and nice. It is God's view of good and evil. God's view of light and dark, Christ and Adam, the truth and the lie. It is the very thing that Adam believed he could know in the garden when he believed Satan's lie.

In order for us to discern good and evil, in order for us to know the Lord, we have to grow in faith – which is the pure and real faculty for knowing the Lord. And as a matter of fact, this faculty is not even ours. I mean, we *use* it to see the Lord. We use it to hear His Word. But, when it comes right down to it, faith is actually a participation in God's view of Himself. If this sounds confusing, just plug your ears for a minute.

In all truth, faith is everything that we have just said it to be, PRECISELY because it is really God's perception, God's understanding, God's sensing, working in us by His Spirit. You can call it "our faith" because it is certainly working in us. But you must also realize that, in fact, it is "the faith of the Son of God" being granted to us. The reason that true faith "comes complete" with understanding and application is because it is nothing less than God's view, God's understanding, being written on your heart. Does that make sense.

Let me try to summarize what I'm saying plainly. Faith is a spiritual view that works in your soul to bring you to the true perception and realization and knowledge of God. That is the first thing I'm saying. It is a sensing that extends far beyond any natural sensing. It is a beholding that is high above all natural senses combined and used to their utmost. The first thing that I'm trying to show you is that faith is something totally other than anything arises from the natural man.

But the second thing I'm trying to say is that this is true BECAUSE faith is actually a participation in the sight that God has, the view that He sees, the Word that He knows, the understanding that He has. It's like God letting you into His view, bringing you into the "loop", so to speak. Long ago the Psalmist said "in YOUR Light, I see Light".

This is all very well communicated in 2 Corinthians. Paul writes

1Co 2:9 But as it is written: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Look at this last part with me. "The Spirit searches all things, yes, even the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?". In other words, I don't know the deep things of you because I am not the spirit that is within you. You don't know the deep things of me because you are not my spirit. Only you know yourself, and I know myself. People say things like this all the time. "How can you tell me why I did that, you don't know me! You don't know what was going on in my heart!". Well, that's where Paul is starting here. Only the spirit of a man knows that man, and nothing external to him.

Well, then he draws the parallel with God. "Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God". So he says, it's the same with God. Nobody external to God can really know Him. Only the Spirit of God really knows God, knows the hidden things of His heart. And then, if he stopped there you would be tempted to give up and say "well then...I guess I cannot know God!". But he continues.

"Now we have **received**, not the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God!" We actually have been given the Spirit that knows the innards, the guts, the deep things of God! God has done what no man can do to another. He has invited us into the loop. He caused us to participate in His knowledge of Himself! He has brought us into His Spirit, and therefore made to partakers of His understanding, His comprehension, His view, His sight, His hearing, His experience of Himself. Can you see what Paul is saying. Look at the last part of this: "we have received the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God". This is fantastic.

God gives us Christ as our life. That is obviously incredible in and of itself. But, as though that were not already unbelievable, He allows us to partake of and experience His knowledge of Himself. He brings us into His light. What is that Light called? Its called faith. It's a pure and wonderful seeing. Of course it is, it is God's seeing being shared with you. In His Light we see light. In His understanding we have understanding. In His Word, we know His truth. We are grafted into His life...but also grafted into His Light. And this light sees with perfect awareness, pure comprehension. And this is the light that Paul says shines in our heart to give us the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. THIS is what it means to stare into the face of the Lord. And THIS is how we learn Christ as those who are in Him.

Consider one more time these words of Paul, "but you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him, and been taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus."