

Eph 4: 22-24 Renewing of The Mind
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The Renewing Of The Mind

I spoke last week with reference to Ephesians 4: 20-21 about learning Christ by faith. And I tried to make three distinct, but related, points. We're going to move into the next three verses today, but they build on what we said last week so I want to briefly review a few things that we said last week before looking at verses 22 -24. In fact, if you try to separate what we said last week - learning Christ by faith - from what we're going to look at this week - putting off the old man and putting on the new - then it really doesn't mean anything. The one is the way that the other happens.

If you'll recall, in Ephesians 4: 20-21, Paul says that the Ephesians did not learn Christ with the futility of their mind, but rather they heard Him, and were taught IN Him, as the truth is IN Jesus. As we said last week, this is the learning or knowing that comes by faith. The three main points that I tried to make last week were these:

1. We must learn Christ as the life of our soul. This is the only true way to know Him. That may sound narrow-minded, but you simply cannot know Him in any other way. You think you do, but you don't. Knowing Christ is a literal participation in His Life. It is an experience of the soul becoming aware of and filled with and constrained by His indwelling life.
2. That begs the question, how do you learn Him as your life? Well the answer to that begins with first of all knowing that if you are born of His Spirit, then HE IS your life. He is the only life you have. Though we are ignorant of and unacquainted with His life in us, He is still the life of the soul. And so we're talking about learning something that is already true. So to learn Him, to know Him, we must see Him, hear Him, learn Him **by faith**.

Now remember, faith is not believing things about Him. Faith is the spiritual faculty of the soul that perceives, knows, experiences, accesses spiritual reality. Faith is not anything that you think or believe. Faith may cause you to think or believe or accept many things. But faith is a spiritual view that is a far greater sense than any natural sense. Remember, all natural senses, sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell....all of these combined and multiplied are still nowhere close to as powerful a faculty as faith. Faith is the greatest kind of perception. It knows God in a pure and real light. And the reason that people most often think that sight is greater than faith is because we are so unfamiliar with genuine faith. **We want our faith to turn into sight. God wants our sight to give way to faith.**

Everything that we know with natural senses is outside of ourselves. We perceive things external to ourselves, and then in order to internalize them, we supply our own understanding and our own application. But faith is very different. If it is true

faith it is the beholding of God who resides in the soul. Paul says, "beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord we are being changed from glory to glory".

- 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 has its own impact on you. It doesn't leave you there to make application. It doesn't leave you alive to need application.

3. The third thing I mentioned last week was the reality that faith is actually God's view, God's mind, God's perspective being given to you. It is not just spiritual understanding, it is the Spirit's understanding. It is God's view, God's understanding, the faith of the Son of God. God is letting you into His Light, into His perspective. That is faith.

I just cannot overstate the importance of learning Christ this way. I've said this before, but the journey towards learning Christ doesn't begin when God shows you something that you don't know about His Son. The journey towards learning Christ begins when God **shows you something you don't know about knowing**. First God redefines what it means to know Him. And then, by growing you up in faith, He can teach you His Son as your life.

And it is only when we understand these fundamental things about faith that the next verses in Ephesians - having to do with renewing the mind - come to have any meaning. You cannot put off the old man or put on the new unless you are learning Christ by faith. Let me put it this way, unless you are learning Christ by faith, putting off the old and putting on the new will be works of the flesh...no matter how hard you try.

Let me read the next few verses:

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: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

So many Christians have dedicated their lives to something that is impossible. So many are attempting to be transformed, are seeking to be like Christ, are trying their hardest to break from their sin and darkness and habitual living. But all of this striving is fruitless because we are trying to escape evil with evil. We're attempting to change the old man with the strength of the old man.

Col 2:20 *Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom*

in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

The soul is only changed by the renewing of the mind, and that works in us only when there is genuine faith.

What is the renewing of the mind? Why does it transform the soul? We've spoken about this on a number of occasions. But as Peter says, to repeat myself is no trouble for me and it might be beneficial for you. The renewing of the mind starts when we begin to learn Christ in the way that Paul has just described. The renewing of the mind means NOTHING unless we are "hearing Him, and being taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus". There is no renewing of the mind apart from growing in faith. If we are trying to learn Christ in any other way, then the renewing of the mind will be a meaningless and foreign concept.

I have had more than one person tell me that the renewing of the mind comes through memorizing Scripture. I have had others tell me that it involves learning to think with a biblical worldview, or adopting a Christian paradigm. Others equate it with purifying the mind from perverse thoughts or images or experiences. I'm sorry to say it, but we only come up with these ideas because we don't understand what it means to learn Christ by faith.

You see, when Christ begins to be shown to your soul by the Spirit of God, you immediately start becoming aware of two distinct things. In the light of His appearing in your soul, in a *real* encounter with the Truth of Christ, **there is always a division made between two things**. There is Christ on the one side, and there is everything else on the other. And you are part of that everything else. Now I realize that in salvation you have been joined to Christ. But when you see by faith you realize that everything you are *by nature* is on the side opposite of Christ, the side that contradicts Him. When God shows you His Son by faith, before the eyes of your heart there is the Man that God has accepted, and on the other side, there is the man, the kind, the creation that God has put away.

Seeing Christ by faith involves the awareness of this division. You may not use this same language. You may not call it a division. But you recognize it. You recognize the incredible wrongness of your ideas. You recognize the otherness of your nature. You perceive and acknowledge the deadness of your soul, the powerlessness of your efforts, the emptiness of your so-called wisdom, the self-love that motivates all that you do. Seeing Christ is both the beholding of the light and the confronting of the darkness.

Whenever I see the Lord with faith there is a renewal and increased realization of this division. You cannot see Christ by faith without also becoming uncomfortably aware of all that isn't Christ. As the one side grows in your understanding, so does the other. That is necessarily so because the true knowledge of God is always a confrontation with and contradiction to the natural man. This is SO important to understand. **You never see His truth along side one of your ideas. Faith will never compliment the mind of man. In His light you will never have one of your thoughts or actions or opinions validated. His truth always dislodges and supplants our ideas. His light always challenges and opposes our opinions. They are divided by a great chasm called the cross. And faith will always show you the difference.**

Somebody might object... "Jason, how do you know His light will always contradict one of my ideas? What if I happen to have guessed correctly? What if I figured it out before He showed me?" That's like saying, "Jason, how do you know that every single red crayon in this box is not blue. You don't know how many red crayons I have here! You haven't seen them all. Of all of these red crayons, I'm sure there is a few of them that are blue!" No, there is a divide between blue and red. They are contrary to each other. They are mutually exclusive. It is either red or blue, but never both.

Adam and Christ are like those two colors. In the darkness of the unrenewed mind you might confuse them, but light will show you the difference. **Faith, the light of the Lord, will always divide in you what is already divided to God. Faith will separate in your heart what God has separated from Himself.**

And when faith begins to increase in your heart you are struck with a realization. You can see that the one side, the side that you are on by nature, is not getting any better. That side cannot change. That side could never be anything more than what it is. You face that in the light, even as Paul says "*the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*". He didn't say "the old man GREW corrupt" or "used to be corrupt". No, that man, that kind, it's just the wrong man. And you understand by faith, you understand in that light, you can see... **that your only hope for transformation is NOT to change your side, but to escape it.** Your only hope for transformation is to be completely and utterly liberated from it, and to be put into, filled with, clothed in, the Man on the other side. In the dark, all of this sounds like theology. But this is a clear and overwhelming reality when faith comes.

Adam, that man, that kind, cannot be changed. He must be circumcised from your soul. He must be put off. And Christ must be put on. A new man. A new kind. This is what the church so often misunderstands. This is why we dedicate our lives to something that is hopeless. The body of Christ has come up with countless thousands of ways and steps and secrets to transforming the natural man. And yet this man cannot change. We have sought to teach him, train him, disciple him, scold him, punish him, empower him, and motivate him to be something different than he is, to do something different than he has always done. But these attempts, these plans and steps and keys and motivational speeches....they only make sense in the dark. A self-help program won't turn a red crayon blue.

But, generally speaking, we don't really want to understand this. Please don't turn on the light. It might interrupt my self-improvement program. It might ruin the thought that I'm actually getting better. Don't turn on the light of faith because what I might see in the light would threaten my ideas about purpose, growth, transformation, and serving God. I'd rather keep guessing and failing in the darkness than face the division that I will see in the Light. A division that will always say, "not I, but Christ".

We'll attend spiritual boot-camps to learn how to be like Paul. We'll march around a city doing spiritual warfare. We'll follow leaders and movements around the world hoping that some of the "anointing" will rub off on us. We'll pay for classes, programs, books, conferences. We'll punish our flesh through discipline and penance, motivate our flesh through various emotional means. These are just a few of the sorts of things we do in the name of knowing God. But we will rarely stand still and see the division between the living and the dead. **Faith is uncommon, because true faith is a threat to the natural man.**

What I'm trying to say is simply that true faith brings you face to face with a division. A judgment. A sword that cuts between two men, two worlds, to kinds. First of all, the division just shocks you. You had no idea that Christ was so OTHER THAN man. I mean, you may have repeated the words a million times, but you'd never seen it until the coming of faith. At first you're so surprised because, even though you have agreed that Christ and man are two different kinds, suddenly in the light you can see that *your* life has stood in contradiction to this Man.

And as you stand and stare at the division, as I said, the realization begins to work in you that Spiritual growth can NEVER be the transformation of me. What I mean is that Adam will never change. I cannot do better. I cannot BE better. And you realize that what needs to happen is that one man must be destroyed, and the other gained. Your soul must cease to be found in the one, and come to be found in the other. One must decrease, the other must increase...otherwise all of the effort in the world will accomplish nothing.

I remember the day when that realization smacked my heart like a semi hitting a deer. I knew that my life had been an attempt to blend together what God had forever separated. And, whereas before, I had all kinds of questions that I wanted to ask God . . . when I began to see by faith, there was really one question that needed answered. How can I put off what I am? How can I put on what I could never be? How can I die to *myself*? How can I live to God in Christ? These questions become the only relevant questions. You see, its no longer "how can I change?". Its no longer " how can I make God accept me?". Its not "what are the keys to being a good Christian". No, very quickly all of that becomes empty and ridiculous. The question is simple: "how can one man be put off, and Another be put on".

Well...the answer is almost too wonderful for us to accept. We seriously don't usually believe it. We usually fight against it and want to add to it because it just seems to good to be true. The answer is that God has, through the cross, translated you out from the one and made you to dwell in the other. The fact is that "of God you ARE in Christ Jesus". The truth is that, by the work of His Son, and your acceptance by faith, you are dead to the one as a matter of fact. You are alive to the other as a matter of fact. You are dead to sin. You are accepted in the Beloved. You are buried with Him. You are raised with Him, and seated in Him. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

And so Paul exclaims,

Rom 6:3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

These statements are the truth regarding all who are born of God's Spirit. These statements are not future experiences, but rather present and eternal realities. This is the finished work of God in Christ. And only ONE thing is necessary for you and I to live accordingly. Only one thing is needed if you want experience this gift of salvation. You could say it a number of different ways, but its just one thing. We need an experience in the spirit of our mind that corresponds to what God has done. Or you could say we need our realization to catch up with God's work. Or

you could say we need faith to apprehend the finished work of the cross. Or you could say that we need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Not our brain. No, Paul says "the spirit of our mind" in our verse today because he's talking about the soul's spiritual comprehension. All that God could ever do for you and to you with respect to salvation has been done. What remains is for you and I to learn Him, and be taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus.

God, having accomplished all things of salvation in and through Jesus Christ, leaves only one thing for you and I. We must know the truth as He has accomplished it in His Son. We must face reality in the Light of the knowledge of glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And this will have its automatic and necessary effect. Learning Him will be, without question, the end of what God has put away. And it will be the experience of what God has established. Can you see this? Learning Christ will not be just Bible verses and good deeds. It will be the putting away, the putting off of one man. It will be the putting on, and being found in, another Man. THIS is the transformation of the soul. Not a behavior change. Not a worldview change. But a change of Life. The end of the one. The increase of the Other.

When faith brings God's reality into view, then that reality impacts you with all of the weight and strength of absolute, objective truth. If you're living according to your senses, you could deny it, hide from it, disagree with it. But the moment you begin to see it by faith, it cannot be denied. It's right in front of you. Truth is a force to be reckoned with, and your soul cannot stand contrary to it. Not after you see by faith.

I'm not trying to sound clever or poetic. I'm just trying to get something said. Though all men object to it or stand opposed to it, God's finished work in Christ stands. So long as you and I pretend to know it according to the senses and faculties and mind of man, we can remain untouched by it. We can imagine what it is. We can talk about ridiculous notions, like changing the adamic man, without realizing our blindness. But if we see by faith, then we see what God has done. And the more that light shines in us the man who is the lie is cut from our soul. And the man who is the Truth is established. What God has judged and put away is put off. What God has finished and exalted is known and experienced.

This is what Paul is describing in Ephesians 4. He is talking about learning Christ by faith. Hearing Him, being taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus. And he is talking about the effect that this kind of learning, this kind of seeing and knowing has on the soul. It has the effect that it completes in you what the cross completed long ago. It has the effect that it puts off from you what the cross put away long ago. It has the effect that one man, the man of lawlessness, the man of sin and death...that man is put off from your soul. And another man, the new man, is put on. And the life that you now live is not the old improved. It is not the old strengthened, empowered, instructed, or disciplined. It is the "*new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*"

Amen