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Pressing On Series

## S4.E3. Setting the Vision

Continuing with Ephesians 4.14-16

The previous Episode began laying the foundation for understanding just what is the “normal” Christian life. The “normal” that we see today seems to fall far short of the normal Christian life revealed in scripture—where there is a higher standard set. It seems that over time the Church has evolved to what it is today, but its evolution has largely been guided more by the mind of man, in a **religious** way involving certain doctrines, rituals, and routine, and not after Christ which brings **life** to the inner man, life that is new and spontaneous. There is a vast difference between Christianity as a religion and Christianity as life. We will now further examine our Ephesian passage in more detail.

Ephesians 4.11-16 was set forth as a foundation to begin understanding this distinction. We will read again the entire passage, and then focus on verses 14-16 (Verses 11-13 of this passage were discussed in the previous Episode 1.)

*“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,*

*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; 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, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 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.” Eph. 4.11-16,*

Verse 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,”***

“If” all the ministries of the Church, and all its services, were focused upon evangelism alone, and on adding new spiritual babies to the Church, then the Church would be full of immature children, unable to fend for themselves in the darkness of this world that surrounds them or evil influences that attack them; they are unable to nurture themselves in even the most fundamental principles of salvation. The writer of Hebrews 5.12-14 puts it this way,

*“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. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 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.”*

Babies need milk for food; they cannot handle solid food, it is too much for them. The milk of the Gospel consists of the most fundamental doctrines of salvation. By training in these *elementary principles*, the babes are taught things like the need for a confession of Christ, rituals like baptism and communion, the historical Christ, Bible memorization, meaningful songs and hymns, proper Christian behavior and morals, and certain skills of ministry or service. One may even hold a certificate or degree having learned all these fundamental principles, and yet remain a babe in Christ in terms of character, immature behavior, and Christ-like stature.

**The Hebrews passage** concludes with those mature or of full age, *“have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”* The meaning of *good* and *evil* in this verse does not pertain to moral goodness or righteousness, though of equal importance. Rather, it relates specifically to knowing “good” sound doctrine, a set of beliefs that actually brings forth an inner quality—that is, what you “are” or are becoming, versus doctrine that only governs religious behavior—that is, what you “do” or should “not do.” Good teaching leads to *life* as an inward transformation of our souls; it is so much more than a mere growth in knowledge. This means that with the impartation of spiritual life, there is not just added knowledge, but a higher understanding of spiritual things.

One can have knowledge of scriptures but are not able to apply that knowledge to personal problems, or they may not even know what those things mean. Many have used Bible knowledge to justify ungodly behavior, to distort the Gospel to mean what it is not intended to mean, to miss-interpret scriptures, and to commit evil deeds in the name of the Lord. All of this has been done down through the age of the Church, and today is no exception. It is safe to say that knowledge without understanding is without value because, without insight and discernment, it cannot be used.

How else can we distinguish between the good and bad in doctrines that are taught, or to judge the good and bad of character of those calling themselves brothers and sisters, or the good and bad in prophecy, or the good and bad in what many call good works—not all seemingly good works are good nor all evil works are really evil. In today's liberal society, many Christian beliefs are thought as evil while their own perverse actions are deemed good, sweeping away society into darkness. In the absence of insight and discernment cults are started, false teachers and false prophets deceptively draw people away to another gospel, or unfounded hopes of prosperity or divine health, and the people become simply followers of blind guides.

Having keen insight and spiritual discernment ultimately leads to the principle of life; and in that life is found a renewed Godly fellowship combined with the transformation of our character—which in turn leads to what may be referred to as the “salvation of the soul.” Today, this very hour, a true believer may look back to the salvation of his or her spirit and simultaneously look forward to the salvation of these bodies; but the present focus is upon the salvation of the soul. For this reason we are encouraged *to draw close to God and He will draw close to you.* (James 4.8) As coming closer to a fireplace on a cold night warms the body, drawing closer to God has a dramatic effect on the soul of man. As Mary, Martha's sister, sat patiently many hours at the Lord's feet, something of divine quality was imparted into her as she absorbed His words, and sensed His presence. Note 2 Cor. 3.18,

*“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”* 2 Cor. 3.18

Think on this for a moment, we “*are being transformed into the same image*”—“*same image*,” that is, the nature and character of this indwelling Christ! The verb tense is present, “*are being transformed*” meaning now, today, in this life preceding the life to come; and it is “*from glory to glory*,” which means from one moment of change from natural behavior to spiritual likeness to the next moment of change. It is progressive. It is as the jeweler patiently chips away at the rough diamond, facet by facet, until the beauty of the multifaceted diamond appears glistening in the light of Christ.

A young child is unstable; he is easily influenced and enticed into foolishness. Darkness and evil lurks at the door. There is an ever present luring by the world, including the public educational system, the mass media, the entertainment industry, and peer pressure, as they all work under the sway of the evil one to lure young souls into their deprived way of thinking and behaving, corrupting their young minds, attempting to mold them not in the image and likeness of Christ but after the fallen nature of man. Mass indoctrination into a godless society has displaced Godly understanding. As it is written, “*We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.*” 1 Jn. 5.19 The world takes powerful spiritual words like *love, compassion*, and even “*born again*” and twists and distorts them into meaning something they are not, just to justify their own unrighteous thoughts and deeds.

A child requires proper nurturing, teaching, counseling, and godly examples; and not only the child, but the young and old of age as well. When the writer of Hebrews 6.1 wrote, “*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection* (maturity),” he was addressing the whole of the Church, with no exceptions. ***Let us go...*** is the encouragement. There remains a standard before us, and that standard is not some famous or powerful personality we desire to

emulate, or some convincing philosophy, but Christ is the only standard. Behold Him for who He truly is. Discover Him. Strive to know Him, for in Him is life. Thus, the following verse,

**Verse 15. “but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ”**

Thus it is reinforced that the grand objective of the Church is to “grow up,” to mature in spiritual stature, to have a renewing of the mind. We must learn to deal with spiritual matters beyond and outside the scope of natural thinking which involves logic and reasoning power. Things must now be approached with the mind of the Spirit. In the natural we learn to only believe what we can see and touch, but are now called to believe in and trust the unseen God with our lives. This is a calling to depart from society’s norm and set our sights on an altogether higher standard, knowing that the world will hate you for it, as Jesus warns, Jn. 15.19,

*“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

Once again is a further word of caution; for deceptively lurking in the shadows is that organized thought called **religion**. Religion likes to mimic things of the spirit, but only outwardly in vague doctrines, buildings, degrees, formal titles, solemn rituals, orchestrated services, and good works. But verse 15 says to “**grow up in all things ‘into Him;’**” there must be a spiritual growth from being outside Christ, and outside the Kingdom of God, absorbed in the old nature of “self,” which is known Biblically as the “old man,” and a deliberate entering into the nature and work of the Spirit of Christ. Religion has limited power to “**transform**” the soul; it can only insist on becoming “**conformed**” to its doctrine, rituals, routines, and behavior. Religion is imposed upon the soul, whereas the life of Christ emanates from within, for it is spiritual. Knowledge of this life is liberating to the soul, it breaks the chains that bind—and many and strong are those binding chains.

True growth only comes from a life that is within, from the implanted seed of Christ. And, unlike religions, the most fundamental requirement is not the outward obedience to a law and regulations, but the most basic prerequisite is *faith*, being fully persuaded of our new position of being “in Christ,” and of “Christ in us.” Do you understand that *faith* means more than just believing in the invisible spiritual realm of the Divine; even the devil believes that. But the definition of faith includes the word *hope* which means the expectation, the anticipation of things to come. (See Heb. 11.1) We must live in a state of hope, expecting and anticipating things like: Phil. 2.13 “*it is God who works in you both to do and to will of His good pleasure,*” and Col. 1.27 “*Christ in you the hope of glory,*” and 2 Pet. 1.4 “*being partakers of the divine nature.*” Each of these transforming scriptures are as compasses, pointing you in the direction to go. The work of faith begins with believing these scriptures are the actual Word of God and having the full expectation of their manifestation in our lives. Therein is our rest in Christ.

As a further reinforcement, recall the awesome truth found in Gal. 2.20,

*“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Gal. 2.20*

I cannot reference this scripture too often, or cease to stress its importance. This verse is overwhelming to the natural mind and seeming unattainable, but it is a Divine truth given for us to lay

hold of, and to anticipate its fulfillment, day by day. I can testify of the power of this verse to set one free even **from** the bondage of religion, of its obligations and duties, of laws controlling behavior, **to** the freedom of the release of new life from within. One need no longer be in bondage to culture, tradition, worldly influences and demands, or even to religious mandates, but you are free to be carried heavenly as on eagle's wings to God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ. Continuing on with our Ephesian passage,

Verse 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."***

Note the importance of beginning this verse with this statement, *the whole Body*, meaning no one is left out, no one is special above all others, independence and isolation is not an option; neither are those factors that tend to separate the people of the world, such as race, gender, wealth, education, social status, culture, or political affiliation. Think in terms of the human body, though one in nature yet composed of many members, each member or part under the control of the head.

Note also that the members of this Body are ***"joined and knit together."*** If Christ is in you, and if He is in me, then whether we realize it or not, we are joined together as one in Christ: white, black, yellow or brown, male or female, educated or uneducated, we are in one bond in Christ. There is a mighty bonding that holds our whole body together that we do not fall apart; so too is a spiritual bond that holds all the Church together, mightily. We stand on the same level in the Kingdom, perhaps being differentiated only by the nature of our calling...apostle, teacher, pastor, evangelist, prophets, prayer warriors, leaders of worship, etc. It is the same Spirit that dwells in Christ that dwells in each one of us. What joins us together is a spiritual bond formed by God, as siblings in a family. In the natural, I am close to my sister and she is close to me; we have been born of the same seed, and therefore are of the same family, bonded together with an unbreakable bond. So too, in Christ, is an unbreakable bond with other brothers and sisters in the family of God.

The verse states that ***"every joint supplies"***—If there is anything outside of the ordinary here, it is the call to be *faithful*—to be faithful is to adamantly remain in focus to serve the Church in whatever capacity our Lord has enabled you, regardless of feelings, situations, or adversity. Jesus describes this faithfulness in His parable of the talents, (Mt. 25.23) *"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'* For the Church to truly function as a Body under its Head, meaning Christ, every joint or part must be faithful in its calling and each and ***"every part does its share"*** for the betterment of the Body.

The verse continues, ***"causes growth of the Body"***— Once again, the Bible repeatedly warns of babes being unstable, unable to understand higher doctrine, unable to receive spiritual responsibilities, unable to respond to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus; babes remain in bondage to an old lifestyle, without strength to overcome things of the old nature. A baby cannot even understand the meaning of an *upward call* let alone pursue it. The ultimate goal of the Church is the spiritual maturity of each individual member. The measure of maturity is measured first in **character - what you are**, - then in **function - what you do**, - and then in true **spiritual fellowship - how you interact with others**.

The word ***"edifying"*** in this verse properly means "to build up," as one would build a house. It is rather easy to build with hammer and nail, for it is doing things in the natural. But to build spiritually,



the task is very long and difficult; for it takes a new mindset, from the outward natural way of doing things, to the inward being led of the Spirit; the focus being first on the soul of man and less upon the comforts and satisfactions of his body. It is relatively easy to care for the outward man, to feed his hunger, provide his shelter, and other basic needs. It is hard to see one suffering in hunger and poverty, and there should be this empathy for others; but we must always remember we are dealing with matters of eternity. The grand goal must always be for the edifying of the soul and spirit of man.

And finally, the verse ends with the statement that all is to be done “*In love*”—This is the **innermost condition** of the whole process—that all things done “*in love*.” This strikes at the core of our being. All actions in the Body, the Church, must take place “in,” or “under” the power and influence of divine *love*—never out of a sense of duty, or under feelings of obligation or reward. Please note, this is not a simple love of emotion, known in scripture as *phileo* love. *Phileo* love involves the emotions of fondness, likeability, something that attracts another to you. Their presence makes you feel good.

However, *phileo* is not the love of this verse. A higher love is used here, scripturally called *agape* love. It is difficult to teach when the same English word, *love*, is translated from two distinct Greek words, *phileo* and *agape*, but the distinction must be made. *Agape* love simply issues forth from the heart, and is directed with compassion towards others. This love is an inward passion, a compulsion, for the spiritual well-beings of others, **in** this life and **for** the life to come. One need not feel an emotional attachment to another for *agape* love to manifest, but only be driven by an inward desire for the eternal condition of their soul. The attachment to others must be spiritual, not emotional.

*Agape* love does not originate from within ourselves alone, but as with all spiritual matters, its supply is from our Head, who is Jesus Christ; we are kept in life by that supply—like the proverbial branch spoken of in John 15 that draws its essence of life from the vine; it can never act independently of the vine; it will die if it tries to act on its own. In this passage Jesus says, “*You can do nothing without me;*” Divine love is higher than natural love, and man is incapable of this love without Christ, because his motive for caring and his goal is personal and not out of the Spirit of love.

Love is guided by truth, and this truth is spiritual reality. We are quite familiar with natural reality; it is easy to relate to. But spiritual reality is from above and must be pursued. Standing before Pilate Jesus said, (Jn. 18.37) “*For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice.*” (Jn. 18.37) The *truth* that Jesus speaks of is spiritual reality, from above. Pilate responded, “*What is truth*”—because *truth* in the natural is subject to personal knowledge and interpretation and knows nothing of spiritual reality.

We must continually seek heavenly truth and never be satisfied with superficial reasoning and logic, but be grounded in spiritual reality. Truth directs our love, and *love* is the vital power that drives the Kingdom of God. As the sun is the center of our solar system and it is the source of all energy driving the system, love is the center and binding force of the Kingdom of God, and Christ alone is the source. It is the inward essence that holds all things together, and the driving force that works to build us all up to maturity in character, and in function, and in fellowship with God and one another.

*Agape* love is far more than a concept, for it is the *grace* and *mercy* of God in action; we can see that in this love that God the Father sent His only son into the world; it is by this love He willingly suffered death on the cross; it is by this love Christ in heaven continues to intercede on our behalf; and it is in this love that the church exists, and functions, and grows. The power of this love must never be

compromised by man's good intentions or human efforts. This unique spiritual love, *agape* love, the guiding force and motivation for God's compassion, is more fully explained in 1 Cor. 13.1-8,

*"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, **it profits me nothing.***

*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **Love never fails.***"

*Agape* love must be our motivation, the driving force within us, guiding our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ—causing us to truly care for the well-being of others, that they be not left behind in a dark and desolate world bound in sin and death, or in struggling to find the fullness of God in Christ Jesus.

We set off on this journey to discover what may be considered the normal Christian Church. What we have found in the passage, Ephesians 4.11-16, is a revelation of a church that functions in a realm outside the realm of religion, worldly influences, and the sway of the devil. This church is founded upon the principles of *life* and of *love*—two words that even most believers have little understanding of, let alone their absolute necessity as the basis for the functioning of the Body of Christ. The title of this message is, "Setting the Vision." Once we see *truth* clearly, and the fog has lifted, and we know the nature of the call of God upon our lives, we must now set out to fulfill His eternal purpose in ourselves, and collectively in the Church.

#### **S4.E3 Questions for Discussion**

1. What is meant by Heb. 5.14, "*those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil?*" And, how does our state of maturity affect our discernment?
2. Explain the significant difference between "conforming" to religion and "transforming the soul." In doing so, what should be our scripture reference?
3. What is "hope" as an important component of faith? How might "hope" influence our Christian walk? Cite some Biblical references?
4. What is the meaning, and the significance of the Body of Christ being "*joined and knit together?*" (Eph. 4.16) Explain the how, and why this divine joining and knitting.
5. What is *agape* love and how does it differ from *phileo* love? What is the significance of this difference? How must this *agape* love be directed?