

“Way?”

Isaiah 43:15-25; John 14:1-12;
Ephesians 4

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Last week I encouraged you to memorize the end of Chapter 3 of Ephesians, starting with verse 16.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts, through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The idea of memorizing something is that it begins to be part of who you are. That's what we talked about last week. When you know something by heart, it begins to dwell in you. What Paul was talking about in Chapter 3 was letting the love of God dwell in us as we are rooted and grounded in that love. Today, he goes on to say what it means to be rooted and grounded in that love, to know a bit about the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. It is what we are filled with as we are filled with the fullness of God.

That's where he starts. He couldn't help himself; he had to give this prayer and this benediction that comes after it because it is so wonderful. Now, today he says that as you know that, think about what it means, allow it to be real in your lives. He starts out talking about unity. He's already hit this theme several times. We are united because of that love. We are the body of Christ through the gift of God's grace in Christ.

Now, he says we also have the gifts that are necessary for us to become that body, to really share our lives together. First Corinthians 12 does more extensive work with that; about how there are so many different gifts. There are some differences among us because we have different gifts, but we are one body. This is one of those places where we have that wonderful ode to oneness where he talks about the unity of the Spirit—one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father and God of us all. There's the oneness he's calling us to. One faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

I could spend the rest of the time we have together with just this next phrase: ...*who is above all, through all, and in all*. There's a lot there, but we're going to move on because I think the nature of what Paul is getting at in this chapter is not just the oneness. He keeps hitting that theme. He wants to bring it up again. He has that wonderful statement of it here. He wants to think about our gifts for ministry, how we are a gift to each other in that respect. And he must have been writing this letter for a reason. My guess is that there was some struggle with this oneness. After all, he's hit it in the first chapter, second chapter, third chapter, and now fourth chapter. He's

encouraging them saying, “Now that you are in Christ, think about what that means.”
Who are we?

This chapter is amazing. All these different ways are being described for us of what this all means. He gets to the point where he’s suggesting we have unity, we have gifts that we are called to in Christ, but we have some problems. One is that we’re tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine. The trouble with that is as we think about it we have a particular meaning for the word *doctrine* and so we immediately go to that. A doctrine is a way of thinking. The word for wind here is different that is sometimes used. Sometimes the word for spirit is used for wind, but the word here is not spirit. It really means a quickly changing wind. So we could translate this as “the quickly changing ways of thinking.” We are tossed to and fro by the quickly changing ways of thinking.

He could have written that about today. I thought at his time in the world things were kind of set, you didn’t change as much, but this phrase to me makes it sound like today. I think about fashion. Wait 2 minutes, and you’re out of fashion. Your electronics are outdated the minute you buy them. We can be tossed to and fro by the newest trendy way of thinking or way of being. So we might ask, what’s the way? That’s what Paul is talking about. Way? What’s the way?

We can go back to the very beginning of the chapter, because I think that’s where he started talking about the way.

“I... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

It’s the way. Now the trouble is, we struggle with that. So he is encouraging us to think about what it takes: to hear the calling and let ourselves live it.

He starts out by saying things like “speak the truth in love.” I want to unpack that a bit because sometimes I think we use that phrase a little too loosely or to use it in our own arsenal so that I can say what I think is the truth to somebody else because, after all, it says in the Bible I can say the truth. It also says “in love,” so we have to be really careful about how we say what we say. But I also want to suggest that there are a couple of ways of thinking about truth. One is, as we heard in John. Jesus said, “I am the truth.” So there is some way we might be speaking Jesus to another. I don’t think it means we are always pushing Jesus on other folks. In fact, I think what it does mean is that there is an alternative way of talking about truth, another way to interpret that word. It means “what is real.” What’s reality? So when we say we speak the truth in love, we speak what’s real in our lives, in love, with one another.

That’s one way he gives us to think about what it means to live into our faith. The other is to grow up into our head, who is Christ, and to use Christ as our example of what we are moving towards. Sometimes, I feel that I would say, “I’m not God. I can’t do that.” But Jesus lived a very real life with his disciples, caring for them. We have a model we can look at, one we can pay attention to, to see how it is to live.

Then he says a third thing. What we do as we speak the truth in love and grow into Christ is that we recognize that what we want to do is what promotes the building up of the body. That's the way it's described. All those things sound like great things, I think, but they can be hard.

What Paul does then is describe the problem. He says don't live as the Gentiles live, or as those who have not come to faith. Then he talks about being in the futility of their minds. Now, again, the word *mind* is a little bit different than just thinking about our brain. The word in Greek means more than just the organ that thinks or the place we do our thinking. It can be as much the way we do our thinking, our reasoning, our way of seeing things. We can live in the futility of the way we see things.

I would suggest it's as if we set up a barrier to our way of seeing things that we can begin to get behind, and when we do that, we can cut off those who don't see the same way we do. If I stand behind this screen, I can see some kind of shadow out there, but think about the futility.

Another way to think about it is that I can think about all kinds of things, but as long as I'm just thinking about them, I'm in my mind. I'm not out in reality. And what happens, did Paul say? It alienates us from the life of God. It's kind of like we are hiding in this thing we build about how we see and who we think we are. Is it truth? Is it real? How easy it is to set up the façade, but he asks us to speak the truth, to be real in love.

What he suggests is that when folks set up this way of seeing, this barrier to others, they lose their sensitivity to one another. It's hard to be sensitive to people one doesn't see or doesn't pay attention to. Do we have those folks in our lives? And they lose all sensitivity, abandoning themselves, then, to licentiousness, greed, and impurity.

When we encounter Christ, when we encounter the love of God, when we know that forgiveness and grace, we are encouraged not to continue to have these barriers that separate ourselves from others. He said there is a way to allow God to renew the spirit of our minds. The spirit—we make it almost other-worldly—but another translation for spirit can be our inner being, who we are. So, he's saying be renewed in the spirit of your minds. Again, think about that as your way of thinking—allowing Christ, letting Christ become our way of thinking, to guide it. We know the wonder of grace. Now find the wonder of living the grace-filled life. That's what Paul is encouraging these folks to do. He's saying be renewed! Let go! Let the façade fall. Be real with one another. Clothe yourselves with the new self, one that gets rid of the façades, one that doesn't look to everyone else for the answers, but looks to Christ. How can I be part of the body of Christ? What are the gifts I can bring to serve? How can I be a follower of Christ?

At the end of the chapter, Paul begins to describe how we follow Christ when he says, "Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and all malice. Put away anything that you think would grieve the Holy Spirit. Be kind to one another,

tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you.” I don’t know what you think of that, but it almost feels overwhelming. Forgive one another even as Christ has forgiven you.

Not only can we know the wonder of God’s love, we are given a life to live that shares Christ’s love as we are rooted and grounded in it, which builds a body, a community of faith. It’s interesting to me, not only does he say the love surpasses understanding, he uses the image of a body which is very organic. It’s something that we can’t always understand. It just grows. He’s giving us some help in the kind of fertilizer, the kind of things we can give it to help it grow. We can be tenderhearted. We can forgive one another even as God has forgiven us in Jesus Christ. Or if we go back, he really states it at the beginning of this passage. “I beg you,” he says, “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Amen.

Lord, we think about the gift you have given us of your grace, how you have broken down the boundaries between us and have come to us. You have encouraged us, you have offered us your love, you have offered us the opportunity to be rooted and grounded in it, to be filled with the fullness of who you are. Help us step out, be real, speak the truth in love and grace, building one another up. Help us deal with the ways we’ve come to see the world. Guide us that we might be able to understand what it means to follow you and to move beyond that understanding to actually doing what you asked: to be your people who love, forgive and show your grace. Lord, thank you for these words. Guide us to be your people. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.