

The New Man – *Ephesians 4:20-24*

Introduction – “*But you have not so learned Christ.*” A person’s reaction to this statement of contrast is a great test of true evangelical faith. The first thing it should convey to the believer is a feeling of relief and thanksgiving. This is because the gospel comes to us as a contrast and not as an extension or appendix of who we are. There is a new way of living because we have life in a new Man. And – because there is a new man, there must be new way of living.

You Learned Christ if You Heard Him (vv20-21) – Why should believers not “*walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk*” (v17)? Because they did not “*come to know*” Christ in this way (v20). To think of it as factual learning alone would be to “*learn about Christ*” but this is not what v20 says. Paul does not merely preach “*about Christ*” but preaches Christ Himself (1 Cor 1:23, Gal 1:16). This kind of encounter with the gospel is not only intellectual, but relational/covenantal, which is why Paul could say that when he had preached, they heard Christ (not “*about*” Christ) and were taught “*by Him*” (v21, see also Rom 10:14-15).

The Truth is in Jesus – Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and so we learn truth “in Jesus.” This is all pointing to our conversion when we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection and not primarily to passing a theological test. If it were a matter of understanding a philosophical or theological teaching in order to be born again, what a travesty it would be and what a rejection of grace. Paul is describing something we have been given, not something to which we attained. This is the work of the Holy Spirit and is all to the praise of His glory (1:13-14, John 3:5-8).

What You Learned When You Learned Christ (vv22-24a) – A little Greek grammar is necessary here. While ethical commands are about to come (vv25ff), the infinitives in vv22-24 are describing what we “learned” or “came to know relationally” at our conversion. It is describing why we are a different people and why we should not and, ultimately, cannot walk as the unbelievers walk. What did we “learn” or “experience” when Christ came to us? We “put off” the old man (which enslaved us to our former conduct) and we “put on the new man.” Putting off/on refers to clothing, to garments and robes which indicate a person’s nature or character. The old, fallen, futile, sinful, Adamic way of being human, to which we were enslaved, was crucified when we were purchased by Christ’s blood (Rom 6:6). Having been “*renewed in the spirit of your mind*” (regeneration-language), we “*put on the new man*,” Christ, the new Adam, the new way of being human. These are not human acts required in order to obtain salvation; they are the inherent elements of the divine work of salvation.

A Little Illustration – Besides robes/garments, what else can this be likened to? The moment a man gets married, he immediately “puts off” 100% of his old status of being single and immediately “puts on” 100% husband. His life has fundamentally changed; it is renewed. But that renewal will have daily experiences; he will get up the day after he is married and have to reorient the way he thinks about all kinds of things he hasn’t even thought of yet because now he is married. Hence, Paul will write elsewhere that we are to “*not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...*” (Rom 12:2).

Created According to God (v24b) – This new man has been created “according to” God, that is, “down along the path of” or “alongside the way of,” or as some translate it, “in the likeness of” God. When God created Adam, He made him in His image. What Adam lost in the fall has been regained by Christ, a new creation in the likeness of God’s image. Peter says we have become “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Pet 1:4), and Paul declares, “*it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Gal 2:20).

This New Man – Putting all of this together, we who are in Christ should not allow our temptations to convince us that we are enslaved to our old nature. The temptations remain; the flesh remains. But the old man was crucified when we were baptized into Christ. With our old nature, we could not resist the influences; we were not able to not sin. As new creatures (2 Cor 5:17), justified by Christ and indwelt by Him, we are able not to sin; we are no longer powerless before temptation. This does not mean that we will live perfectly before Christ calls us home (when we will not be able to sin), but we have a new ability to respond to the ethical commands that will follow.

The Stage of the Battle – Paul’s admonitions remind us that we are not strangers to the ongoing battle of the Spirit and the flesh while also reminding us that we are no longer in bondage to sin or the old man. There is a terrible pride in believing that we have risen above ordinary men and will not have the struggles of others. Bryan Chappel writes, “The residue of the old nature persists (even though that nature is dead). The old man’s patterns of thought, word, and deed have placed deep ruts in our lives...No one who struggles against sin is unique or strange or alone.”

“But you have not so learned Christ” – If you have heard Him, been taught by Him, you know that there is nothing vague or indefinite about the newness of the life that is yours. It is not difficult to define or recognize. It is clear cut and obvious; it stands out – and while there will always be a struggle, anybody should be able to recognize the new man in you at a glance. Starting with you...