

Ephesians 4:20-21 Learning Christ
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Learning Christ

We're going to jump back into Ephesians this morning. We're in Eph 4:20 if you want to turn there in your Bibles. If you'll recall from a couple weeks ago, I talked about the futility of the mind. Paul just finished telling these Ephesian believers that they were no longer walking as the rest of the Gentiles in the "futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart"

Paul then states that He knows that these believers have "not learned Christ in this way". In what way? In the futility of the mind. These people have not learned Christ in the futility of *their* mind. He says,

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

Most of your Bible's probably read "if indeed you have been taught BY Him, as the truth is in Jesus". But the Greek word there is actually "in". If indeed you have been taught IN Him. And I wouldn't make a big deal about that if I didn't think that the difference was significant. It's one thing to be taught something by Christ. It's a very different thing altogether to learn Christ by having been taught IN Him.

This verse, and the two verses that follow are, in my opinion, one of the, if not the clearest, statements of transformation in the entire Bible. This is the heart of what it means to be conformed to the image of Christ. So it is imperative that we allow the Lord to show us what this is talking about, and more importantly, that we experience this reality.

Quite literally, everything of spiritual growth and purpose and reality has to do with this little phrase in verse 20 – learning Christ. And Paul wants you to understand something about this phrase. He wants you to realize that learning Christ is impossible in the futility of your mind. He wants you to stop, before you even start down the dead-end road of learning about, studying, memorizing, and applying Christ and His teachings. That is not how a soul learns Christ.

Before I try to describe what learning Christ involves, I usually find it helpful to say a few things about what learning Christ is NOT. And since there is nobody I know better than myself, I often like to use my life as an example of ignorance. For the majority of my life as a Christian, I would have told you that I was interested in genuine heart transformation. I know I would have told you that I wanted to learn Christ. But, at the same time, I didn't know what that was or how it worked. I liked

the idea, though...and was probably quick to assume it was happening in me whenever I got excited about the Bible, or desired to follow God, or worked hard in ministry, or learned something new about Scripture, gifts of the Spirit, prophecy, whatever.

You see, the idea in my head was that God was going to meet with me, so to speak, during prayer and fasting, He was going to accompany me during ministry, He was going to shower love on me during my days, anoint me to teach and heal his body, give me the right understanding of Scripture. I was looking for Him in all of these ways. I was looking to learn Christ like this.

And because of that, and not really because I was driven by works religion, I served and prayed and fasted and studied. I gave my time and energy and heart to what I believed would put me in His way. I thought I would come to know the Lord as I encountered Him day by day, as I prayed and served and studied. I suppose that most people make this assumption.

Maybe you're thinking "what's wrong with that". Well, nothing is inherently wrong with prayer and service and study. I still do those things today. But what's wrong is the idea that God is somewhere external to myself who approaches me and instructs me through words, and lessons, and encounters, and ministry. What's wrong is that I sought to know God as everything other than the ONE way that He must be known for the heart to be changed. I didn't know what it meant, nor had I ever had anyone explain to me (except for the pages of the Bible which I misunderstood)...that I needed to know Christ as my life. You see, that was a foreign reality.

It was a foreign *reality*...but unfortunately it wasn't a foreign *concept*. I say that because I wish that it was a foreign concept...then maybe I would have taken it seriously when I came across in the Bible. Part of my problem was that I WAS familiar with the concept of Christ being life. I was familiar with the CONCEPT of Christ living in me. On a true and false test, I'd probably have scored the same then as I would now. But learning Christ has nothing to do with true and false answers.

You see, I had thanked Him as my Savior, and adored Him as my Bridegroom, and feared Him as my King, but I hadn't learned Him as my life. I honestly didn't even know what that meant. And the sad reality is that I later found that I didn't really understand anything about what it meant for Him to be Savior and Bridegroom and King until I began to see all of that in relation to the fact that He was my life. He was my Savior, because He was my life. He was my Bridegroom, because "he who is joined to the Lord has become one Spirit". He is my King, because He reigns in my soul, taking captive all things contrary to Himself, punishing disobedience, conforming my soul to Himself. You see, Jesus is many things to you and I. But He is many things to us only in that He is first our life. There are many titles that He has, but each of them corresponds to an inward experience of the risen life of Christ.

He is not your King in that He tells you what to do after dinner. That's not how it works. He's not your Savior because He opened a door for you to go to heaven. No, that's a very shallow view. He's not your Bridegroom because you're waiting for Him to marry you in the sky. You see, all of those misunderstandings come out from first misunderstanding the nature of our relationship with Christ. And first and foremost...the very foundational reality beneath all others...is the fact that you have died and it is no longer you that live, but Christ that lives in you. Only in that context, in that reality, can the Spirit of God make sense out of King, Bridegroom,

Savior, Judge, Lord, etc. These will cease being outward things for you to study, and become inward things for you to realize as you face Him in those roles. Your soul must face Him in all that He is. And it will, if you will know Him as your life.

So what is learning Christ? What does it mean to know Him? Well, the next verse says it better than I ever could, and yet it needs to be explained. It needs explaining not only because it has been mistranslated in our Bibles (as we have seen) but because it has been misconstrued by the natural mind. But listen to the way that Paul says this *"But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus"*

Learning Christ is not where things about Him are shown to you from the outside, but when He reveals Himself from the inside. You see, you have to understand something about Christ. Paul says it over and over again. He's actually living in your soul. Christians like that *as an idea*, but we usually don't really do anything with it. Maybe we say we "feel Him" there every once in a while, or maybe we say that He gave us an idea from time to time. But we really don't know what to do with the fact that Scripture tells us time and time again that the living God resides in the soul of redeemed humanity.

And so when we teach about Him, we teach about Him as the man who walked the Judean countryside. Well, that's easy for us to imagine. We can picture Jesus with a beard and sandals walking around on roads and talking in words. Or when we teach about Him we talk about Him in a place called heaven, ruling with an iron scepter and riding a white horse. Well, that's not hard for us to imagine either. Those are images that the natural mind can conjure up pretty easily as well. **But who can imagine the resurrected Son of God residing in the soul of man teaching Himself through the coming of spiritual light?** Who can imagine that? Nobody can. And so, even though the Scriptures describe it, we ignore it. We stick to the beard and sandals and white horses and pearly gates. We find that much easier to understand, and much more interesting to preach.

You say "where does Scripture describe Christ in that way". Oh friends, just about everywhere it mentions Him in the epistles of Paul and John and Peter. He is the Light of Life that enlightens every man. . He is "the light is shining in our heart to give us the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ". The "daystar is rising and the day dawning in our hearts". "Beholding in a mirror the very glory of God we are being changed"...as the heart turns to the Lord the veil is removed. When Christ who is our life is revealed, then we are revealed together with Him in glory. Our verses for today, which we will get to say very much the same thing as well.

Learning Christ is where the soul of man becomes deeply acquainted with the new Life that resides within it. Prior to new birth, it was obviously just you. You and I were dead in trespasses and sin, without God and without hope in the world. But new birth is exactly what it says – it is a new birth. Another life. Not a better you, but another Life, another Seed, something altogether new. And that Seed, that Son, literally lives in you as the only life that is in you.

Prior to Him you were a living being, but you had no life. You were a biological organism with an eternal soul. But you had no life. You had nothing of Life because Life is a property of God. The only way you have life is NOT when God gives you some, but rather when God Himself lives in you. And that is precisely what new

birth is. You were born of His Spirit by partaking of Him. And so you see why I am sometimes particular about the translation of John 3. It literally says "unless you are born from above you will not see the kingdom of God". It doesn't say "unless you are born again".

Regardless of our words, your soul was made a partaker of God's eternal Spirit. But do you think that your newly created, hopelessly ignorant soul knows ANYTHING about the eternal Life who has just made you part of His corporate home? God is God. God is eternal, and knows all things spiritual. He is all things Spirit and has created all things natural to bear His reflection. How much of that, how much of anything do you suppose your soul knows of God when you are born of His Spirit? When you are born from above? I'll answer the question for you. Your soul knows absolutely nothing. Not one thing when you are born again except for the awareness of your need, and the awareness of His provision. Everyone that is born again has only that amount of understanding to start with.

Oh, it really doesn't matter if you were born again after being a Bible scholar for 49 years. That gives you no advantage in learning a Life that you've never experienced before. That gives you no advantage in seeing a kingdom that you've just been born into. It's sad that we think that it does. You could be born again today, having just finished memorizing the entire Bible yesterday, and you would have no inherent advantage over an uneducated, illiterate, child.

Don't think for a minute that this thing is about brains. Brains are only good for natural things. I'm glad I have a brain. I find that it comes in very handy for most of my natural endeavors. But I also find that it often gets in the way of my spiritual endeavors. It doesn't have to, but it has a funny way of thinking that it can know spiritual reality when spiritual reality is only ever deposited directly into the soul from the Spirit of Christ. **When it comes to knowing Christ, the brain has to catch up to the soul.**

Anyway, I was asking you how much you think you know of the eternal life of God that resides in your soul after you are born again. And the answer is that you know virtually nothing. If only we would accept this. If only we wouldn't substitute the knowledge about God for the knowledge of God. Knowledge ABOUT God is anything that comes to you from the outside. I don't just mean book knowledge. I'm talking about experiences, direction, power encounters, miracles, reading, hearing...unless faith comes by that hearing. It is possible that with all of these, the heart could turn to see Him where He is, to know Him as your life. But none of these things in themselves is how the soul learns Christ.

Learning Christ does not happen with effort or diligence or discipline or study or experience. Learning Christ happens in the Light of His appearing. It happens when the Spirit that is in you is allowed to shine in the darkness of the human soul. Picture three circles, one inside the other, and another inside of that one. Body is the outside circle, soul is the next, and Christ is the circle inside the soul. (DRAW THIS) Nothing from the outside, not even experiences of God in the natural realm, nothing passing from the outside in is going to teach you Christ. Knowing Christ is when the center circle, which is Christ Himself, is permitted by the soul to shine and conquer and consume the second circle. **Knowing Christ is when the Life that is in you teaches itself to the soul through the appearing of the Lord.**

And this is why I often insist that truth isn't something you read and then apply to yourself. That doesn't actually accomplish anything. That kind of application is like putting on a coat of paint. It might cover something, but it will never change anything. You can't apply truth to your life. First of all, because you don't have a life left to apply it to. And second of all, because the only thing that actually transforms your soul is when it is literally filled with the light of the His Life.

But we say, well then why doesn't that happen all the time? If all that it takes is for that light to shine in my soul, lets have it! But its not that simple. Well, actually...it is that simple, but it doesn't work very well, or very often, when we are looking the other way, and when we are protecting ourselves from the light by hiding in the darkness.

We often talk about seeing the Lord as though the Lord *finally* revealed His Son in us, or the Lord *finally* let me see this or that, or He at last gave me the light to understand. But actually, a more accurate way to describe this is to say "I finally allowed the Light. I finally permitted Him to shine in my darkness and destroy some imaginations. I at last opened up a part of my soul to His appearing." It sounds better the other way because then the responsibility is on Him.

We would much rather learn what He said, and where He went, and how He died and rose. We would rather learn these stories. And then add to them our suppositions about what He will do one day, and what it might be like to meet Him. All of that can be quite exciting, depending on the person presenting it. But more importantly, all of that can be attained in the mind at no cost to the soul. But its not that way in the knowing of Christ. Christ is known, Christ is learned by the soul in the displacement of all that was formerly there. The cost of knowing Christ, just as Jesus said, is losing your life. Not the annihilation of your soul. But the cutting from it of the entire kind, creation, and covenant that fell short of the glory of God.

If you want to know God, if you want to learn Christ, it is going to cost you what you call your life. There is no way around that.

Christ is in you, and you are in Christ. Regardless of whether the eyes of our hearts have seen much of this reality at all, it is still the life and place and truth of all who are believers. You are in Him, made alive together, raised together, seated together in heaven. Heaven is the spiritual realm of life and reality as it is in Christ. Your body is on the earth. Your soul literally lives in heaven. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. This is finished. And so because of this, the days for hearing *about* Him, have, for you, come to an end. For you now there is something much greater than hearing *about* Him. **For you there is hearing Him.** I don't mean hearing words from Him. I mean hearing Him. I don't mean God thundering out of the sky telling you something in English. I mean God thundering out of heaven, out of the spiritual realm and reality where He has brought your soul...I mean God speaking to you in Son.

Heb 1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us in Son,

"Spoken to us IN SON". This is what I'm talking about. This is hearing Him. Not with the ears on your face. Not with your mind. Hearing Him speak from Heaven, showing you what and where you now are. Showing you the realm and reality and Life of Christ that you are in.

Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven,

He already spoke in the earth. He already spoke in earthly ways and earthly words. In a multitude of types and shadows and prophesies and pictures. He spoke that way already, to the ears and eyes of the natural man. He spoke in various ways to the fathers. BUT NOW HE SPEAKS IN SON. And the only question for our hearts today is whether we have heard THAT Word. We've all heard the words. But have we heard the Word that He speaks in Son? Can we hear the Word that comes out from the heavens? Or are we refusing Him who speaks? Are we looking for words and laws and rules and religion? Or are we looking to hear Him and be taught in Him *as the truth is in Jesus.*

Remember what I said last week? You can't separate something that Christ is from Christ. You just can't do it, and yet we always try to. I gave the example last week of righteousness. So many of us are trying to figure out how to be righteous now that we're Christians, and that just doesn't make any sense. You can't separate righteousness from Christ. Christ, your life, is righteousness. And righteousness works in you to the measure that Christ works in you.

We do that with purpose. What's my purpose? Somebody get ahold of a prophet so that I can find out my purpose in life, in my job, in my church? No. You can't separate purpose from the one who is God's purpose. Christ working in you, Christ known by and formed in the soul...THAT'S YOUR PURPOSE. It will never be something you do, you learn, or you teach. Those things may, or may not, be motivated BY purpose. But not a single one of those things will ever be your purpose.

We could go right on down the list. We try to do this with the concept of reward or inheritance. Boy I can't wait until Jesus gives me my inheritance. What in the world could He possibly give you that would be better than Him? You can't separate inheritance from Him who is the inheritance of your soul. He's not going to give you a reward, He is the reward. He's not going to give you a crown of life, He IS the crown of life.

Or good works. Jesus tell me what things I can do that are good? Tell me what I can do that would be considered good fruit. Again, and again we do it. Fruit is the increase of the seed, and nothing else. Nothing else on or around the plant is considered fruit. If I handed you a Frisbee that was caught in an apple tree and told you to enjoy the fruit, you would think I'm crazy. Why? Because you can't separate fruit from the increase of the seed. A Frisbee was not the increase of the seed, I don't care how close to an apple you found it.

Well, it's the same thing with truth. Truth is not something that Jesus is going to teach you. Truth is Jesus Himself being taught to you. Truth is the appearing of

Christ as the life of your soul. And it is nothing else. Jesus is not trying to teach you truth as a thing. He's not trying to make you understand true Bible verses and give you true books. Jesus is seeking to unveil Himself to your soul so that you can see and know Him and abide in Him. Not the foolishness and futility of the natural mind. But the revealing of the living Christ. Not man's systematized best guess. But the Light of Life showing us where we are. The Word of God speaking from Heaven, where we have been raised and seated in Him. The Truth, as it is in Jesus, becoming the truth as it is in our soul.