

INTRODUCTION

Last time we considered Paul's exhortation not to live like the unbelieving world around us. In fact I trust that we saw that it is actually impossible to live like the unbeliever once you have been saved by the grace of God. The reason for this is that the unbeliever's thinking is futile and their understanding is darkened whereas the believer has had his life enlightened by Christ so that we think upon what really matters and can understand gospel truth.

Now the outcome of a futile mind and darkened understanding is that they are separated from the life of God, they are ignorant of the things of God and they hardened their hearts so that they lose sensitivity and give themselves over to every kind of sensuality. Therefore the Christian cannot live like that we do not think like the unbeliever thinks and our understanding has been enlightened concerning the things of Christ.

So now Paul states the contrast with the words "you however" or "but you." The emphasis in the Greek is on the word "you." The Christian cannot live like the unbeliever because:

1. THE CHRISTIAN WAY IS THE WAY OF LEARNING CHRIST (vs. 20-21)

Paul in these verses that we are looking at is setting the Ephesian Christian in a strong contrast to the worldly, sensual people of whom he has just been describing. The Christian way is nothing like the way of the unbeliever therefore there will be a clear contrast of lifestyles. Now once again the NIV has I believe weakened what Paul actually says here. The Greek of verse 20 says "but you did not so learn Christ."

The reason why the NIV has changed the wording here is that the idea to learn Christ is not a very common expression and indeed can be an awkward expression in English. In our language we learn facts and subjects we can even learn from people but we never learn people, but that is what Paul is saying. Now this phrase could mean something like learn in the School of Christ or learn the ways of Christ or it simply could mean learning Christ in a personal and intimate way.

Now it is in the past tense here so we learn Christ when we trust in Him for salvation but it of course has present implications so that our relationship with Christ could be described as a learning one as we daily discover his person and character and ways as we fellowship with him. It seems that Paul not only meant learning the doctrines and truths about Christ but actually learning in our personal knowledge and experience of him.

So that the Christian's relationship with Christ is a learning relationship where yes we learn his truth and his ways but actually experimentally we are learning more of him as he reveals to us his personhood and his godliness and as he works that out into our own lives.

Now Paul describes this learning Christ experience in a few more details. What is involved in learning Christ?

a) First it involves hearing him (vs. 21) - Once again the NIV I think has got it wrong here for as I understand it there is no 'of' in the Greek it is just 'surely you heard him.' For Paul is not talking about hearing about Christ and hearing about his teaching but Paul is thinking about hearing Christ personally. Now it must be said that no one in the church at Ephesus heard Jesus Christ personally. So what does Paul mean here?

What Paul means here is that those who taught the Ephesian believers about Christ were men who did so from the Scriptures and from their own experience of Christ (Paul met Christ in a

vision). Now what Paul is saying is very important for us, what he is saying is that when we hear the Scriptures being preached and proclaimed we are hearing the voice of Christ speaking to us.

This of course assumes that the preaching is Christ centred and biblically accurate and correct. But if that is the case then every person can be confident that as they listen to God's word proclaimed we can expect to hear Christ speaking to us by his Holy Spirit. These Ephesian believers were like the unbelievers described in the earlier verses but then they heard Christ speak to them through the word of God and as a result they responded and were saved.

Now this is teaching us that to learn Christ involves him speaking to us through his word. We can be confident that when the Prophets and Apostles were originally given God's word they recorded it as given and then passed it on to the next generation so that Christ would be heard in that generation through his word. That is the case in our generation as well. When we come to church what do we expect. Perhaps we expect some helpful principles that you can apply to your own life at this moment of time.

Perhaps you are looking for some comforting or encouraging words but unless we have come expecting to hear Christ then we are failing to learn Christ, as we should. Perhaps some of us don't grow as Christians because when we read God's word we do not approach it with the right attitude. We read it out of duty or because we enjoy reading it and it does support us in our everyday life but we must approach it every day expecting to hear God speak to us.

Whether that is at home or at church or somewhere else we should be coming to God's word with excitement in our hearts with anticipation as to what God is going to say. I think as Evangelicals we can get so use to the Bible that we use it like a textbook instead of the word of God. Now if Christ is going to speak to us through his word then we must approach our reading of the word with great seriousness. This means that we must give quality time to it.

We must find the best time for us where we can shut out of our mind all that is distracting us so that we can focus on Christ. We must confess our sin to him before we start so that there is nothing that will hinder us and we ought to read it prayerfully and slowly asking God for the help of his Holy Spirit in understanding it and in applying it to ourselves. Then when we have discovered what the bible is saying we must then accept that word as what Christ is saying to us?

Sometimes Evangelicals can divorce the bible from Christ so that we can say the bible said this to me this morning when really if the bible has said that to us then this is what Christ has said to us this morning. This approach to Scripture gets us away from the mystic idea 'that of a word from the Lord approach.' Of course there are many times when God draws our attention to a verse in our reading that a word or sentence just seems to stand out to us, but every word that we are reading is God's word, it is Christ word to us and we must act upon it whether we have discerned what some call the still small voice of God or not.

b) Secondly we learn Christ when we are in him (v 21). Paul makes the point that we are taught in him. Now you cannot learn Christ until you have received him and of course receiving him is very much part of learning him. But no one learns Christ or is truly taught by Him until we in faith are in Christ Jesus. Now let me ask you are you in Christ? Perhaps so far what I have been saying is a little strange to you.

You understand learning about Christ and every week you come to Church to learn about him but your actual experience of Christ does not exist. You have good head knowledge but no heart knowledge. Well Paul says that learning Christ involves being in him, which means in union with him in a personal relationship with him. Are you in union with Christ do you know Him personally?

If not then you will never learn Christ, until you come to the point where you recognise you are a sinner and in great need of salvation. Once you recognise that and then go further and trust Christ to save you because he has died for sinners like you; then you learn Christ, which has everyday implications. You never know the truth about God and salvation until you are united by faith to Christ. This is because Jesus said of himself I am the truth (v 21) and once you know the one who is true then all that we learn from him is true. You see this is why it is impossible to continue living like the Gentiles do for Christ teaches us truth, true doctrine that leads to true practise.

So if we are going to learn Christ then we must hear him in his word and we must be united to him in faith and by grace. If you say to me I have read the bible but don't get anything out of it then I have to ask; do you know Christ? Are you united to him and if so then are you listening to him for he alone is truth all that he said is true and all that he did while he walked this earth was true. Therefore he can be trusted, so trust him, believe his word come and be saved.

2. THE CHRISTIAN WAY IS THE WAY OF A CHANGED LIFESTYLE (vs. 22-24)

This really is the application of learning Christ. A learning Christ person will be a changed person Paul has already said that the Christian way is not the way of the unbeliever therefore the evidence that someone is learning Christ is a changed and changing lifestyle. This is a constant thing; our lives should always be undergoing transformation our lives should always be conforming to Christ Himself. Paul now shows us how our lifestyle will be changing.

a) It will be a life of continual repentance (v 22) – When we came to Christ what did we learn. We learnt that repentance is an essential part of a transforming life. We ceased to be the people we once were and so we began to put out of our lives things that did not conform to the way of Christ. 'To put off' is in the past tense and is thinking of a decisive action at conversion to turn from sin to Christ. But once again it has present application as we seek to daily live out that decision by repenting of all known sin.

Now this phrase 'to put off' Paul uses a number of times in his letters. He is thinking about changing your clothes perhaps you have been doing a dirty job at home or work and so when you have finished the first thing you do before anything else is take of those old clothes get washed and replace them with nice clean clothes. Well spiritually this is what Paul is thinking about. When we have Christ as our teacher then he tells us to get rid of all sin from our lives.

This means that we need to repent of things that are not in keeping with learning Christ. It could be an action that we do that we know is sinful and wrong. Then we have to face up to it and confess it and repent from it. It's inconsistent with the decision to put off sin. You know that repenting from it is involves turning away from it for good. That's what we did when we came to know Christ we turned from our former way of life never to go back to it. Is there still an action that you need to give up, one that perhaps you have held on too for years but which you know is wrong? What about our attitudes? Are there attitudes that we need to repent off and put out of our lives?

Perhaps an attitude against a family member or some work colleague or some neighbour that you know is not in keeping with learning Christ. What about our attitudes to other Christians in this church or in some other church? Does it need to be dealt with and put out of our lives because it simply is not in keeping with learning Christ? Perhaps it's the use of our tongue that needs to be repented off. Perhaps we have become use to lying and before we even think of it, it is out of our mouths and we are too embarrassed and proud to do anything about.

Well such things cannot continue for Jesus is truth therefore all that we say must be truthful. What about the slander that we for some reason find ourselves being involved in? Slandering the name of other Christians because of inferiority or jealousy or for some other reason. What about that sharp tongue that a fellow brother and sister have felt far too often? All these things must be

repented off because we have learned Christ and such things are not in keeping with our relationship with Him. They belong to the former way of life. We need to realise that our sinful nature is always seeking to get a foothold again in our lives, it sometimes presents itself to us in very attractive ways but we must always understand that our old self is always corrupt and its desires are deceitful painting a better picture of itself than is true of our old nature.

We must always resist it and one way that we do this is by a constant repenting of actions attitudes and words that are not in keeping with our new nature.

b) It is a life of renewed minds (v 23) – The word ‘new’ or ‘renewed’ points to a thoroughgoing process. Becoming a Christian means more than eliminating a few bad habits from our lives, it involves a complete overhaul and remaking of one’s life (2 Corinthians 5:17). This newness of life affects ones attitudes and one’s mind. The idea of mind here is not just our thought processes although it includes that but our whole inward being.

Now once again although Paul is thinking about what happened at conversion this again has everyday implications for us. We are not simply renewed at conversion and that is it. No! This process continues within our lives. We could say we are new within we are being changed from within. Therefore the Christian ought to be constantly changing. Our thinking will be changing and so there is nothing wrong with changing our minds in fact I would be surprised if we never changed our minds on certain issues. When we first become Christians there will be all sort of thinking that will need to be changed and slowly this is being done. Our worldly mindset is being changed to a godly mindset and this is a continual process.

As we study Scripture our minds will be changed about certain beliefs that we have held or about certain actions that we viewed as right or wrong. Our attitudes will be changing as well. Our attitude to the Government changes when we become Christians so that we pray for them. Our attitude to money and materialism and work changes and constantly needs changing so that such things do not control our lives.

Our attitude to our family and to ourselves changes so that we become increasingly less selfish and therefore our attitude to others changes so that we show more love and compassion for our world and especially for God’s people. Now this renewing process is going on all the time and the process that God uses is His Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. As we read, mediate and hear the Scriptures God’s Holy Spirit begins to apply His word to our minds and to our hearts so that we are being renewed being made increasingly more like Christ Himself. This is what is involved in learning Christ. Therefore do not resist God’s Holy Spirit in your life, do not kick against his work, do not allow our old sinful nature to raise its head; put off sin and be renewed in the attitude of our minds.

c) It is a complete new life (v 24) – This is really the outworking of the renewing of our minds. Just as we are to put off whatever is not in keeping with our new life so we are to put on different clothes our new self. A radical change has taken place the old has gone the new is now in place. The putting on the new man is in the ‘aorist tense’ this is a once for all decisive action just as the putting off is a decisive action.

This new man that we put on is actually put on for us it is not the result of some moral effort that we make but it is the result of the work of God within our souls by the indwelling Holy Spirit. But just as putting on our new self was something that happened at conversion there is a continual aspect to it. This new self is to make us more like God and what will make us more like God? Living a life of holiness and righteousness.

Now that obviously involves us living a disciplined life; a life that will encourage righteousness and holiness; a life that reflects our new man. This involves action from us, which we will see next

week but for now we need to understand that our lives should be reflecting our new nature, right actions and different lifestyle should be obvious in every Christian. We cannot live like the unbelieving world because we are no longer like them, we now learn Christ, we are by faith in union with him, our old way of life has gone we now have a newness of life in Christ therefore is righteousness dominate within our lives are we known by holiness of life?

Do unbelievers know by our words actions and attitudes that we are Christians?

I trust we all will become increasingly righteous and holy as we all continue to work out the implications of having put off our old nature and having put on Christ. Let's pray that God will do his work of sanctification in the heart of every Christian so that each one of us becomes more like our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen