

Sermon – 12/10/2008 am

Renewed In Christ

Study Text: Ephesians 4:20-21

One day in India we gave a village lady a pink T-shirt for her daughter. Some time later we saw the girl wearing the shirt which we recognised from the writing on it. It was no longer pink but black and grimy. The girl wearing the shirt was bare foot and filthy. Her hair was dirty and knotted. The girl's mother worshipped idols. She lived without God and without hope. Her appearance and that of her children reflected this hopelessness. Her whole life reflected the spiritual darkness of her heart.

Some time later this lady heard the gospel and believed in Jesus. She became a new creation in Jesus Christ. She was illiterate but learned and loved that great versin II Corinthians 5:17 – *if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come*. As a new person, as one born again of the Spirit of God, her whole life changed. She gathered all her idols and threw them out of the house. She began to speak and act in love rather than swearing and cursing anyone and everyone. She began to bath herself and her children and comb their hair. They were still poor and could not afford new clothes but she washed their clothes and made them clean.

This change in her life was noticed by her neighbours. Some became afraid and started avoiding her. Others became abusive and started throwing stones on her roof. She wanted to leave the village because of this oppression but she stayed on living a life that reflected the new person that she had become in Jesus Christ, a life worthy of her calling.

Learned Christ

'You should no longer walk as the Gentiles in the futility of their mind' wrote Paul as he reminded the believers at Ephesus of their old way of life without Christ. They had lived with calloused hearts; they were ignorant and walked in darkness. They had given themselves up to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But now! This word 'but' cancels all that has come before. How wonderful this word is in this situation. It is a word of power, a word of hope, a word of light. Remember back in chapter two where Paul spoke of them being dead in sin and walking with the devil. 'But God' he declared to them; God made you alive with Christ. It is the same 'but' here – 'but now'. It is God who has touched there hard and dead hearts and made them alive. Here the focus is upon how they learned Christ. This radical transformation came about through the power of the gospel.

I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Paul used the negative to emphasise the positive in that verse as he does here in Ephesians. *You have not so learned Christ*. He means that if you have truly learned Christ you will no longer be living under the control of lusts and greed. Rather you will be living with trust and love for Jesus.

You have not so learned Christ. What does he mean to ‘learn Christ’? Does he simply mean to learn about Christ or learn from Christ? It is possible to know about Christ but not know Christ. Some people study the Bible along with other books to learn about this historical figure. Some people even come to church and learn a lot about Christ but do not know Christ.

The devil knows all about the Bible and about Christ. He quoted Scripture to Jesus. The devil believes that God exists and trembles (James 2:19). How deluded are those who say that God does not exist – they are more ignorant than the devil. But the point is, that to say God exists and that I believe in God is not what it means to learn Christ. To know all about Christ is not the same as knowing him. To love the teaching of Jesus is not the same as loving Jesus. To believe in God is not the same as to being transformed in the inner man through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The world thinks that education and knowledge is the great panacea for evil. If people know the dangers of unsafe sex, drugs and drinking they will refrain from such things – so the thinking goes. More knowledge however, does not mean changed behaviour – surely we have learned that by now. That village lady I spoke of had been taught about cleanliness. She had been given soap to wash her children and a comb for their hair. She sold these things to buy cigarettes. She continued living in filth and worshipping idols.

But one day she learned Christ. One day she heard the gospel and came to know Jesus Christ as her personal saviour and Lord. She heard not only with her head but with her heart. She not only learned about Jesus but learned Jesus. Jesus dispelled the darkness from her heart, the darkness displayed in idol worship and filthy living.

It was the same for the Ephesians. Learning Christ led to a complete transformation in their thinking and living. *You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God* (I Corinthians 6:11). It is all there in this great declaration of the apostle. Learning Christ involves the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. It means being washed of your sin; it means being put right with God; it means becoming holy in Jesus. All three of these must go together. You cannot have one without the other. You cannot be washed and justified and not be holy. You cannot be holy without being washed of sin and justified in Christ.

Heard and Taught In Christ

Learning Christ means, in the first place, hearing him. *How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?* (Romans 10:14). One of the greatest obstacles to belief today is hearing the gospel. ‘But we have so many churches and the Bible is freely available’ you say. Yes, but who is listening. You may think Sunday trading and sport is just about fun and getting on with life. But there is a darker motive – to stop people hearing the gospel. In the time of Charles 1 in England a ‘Book of Sports’ was commissioned to counter Puritan preaching regarding the Lord’s day.

Surely you heard Christ. What happened on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached Christ? Did people go away saying ‘that was boring’? Did they go away saying ‘that was a fine message’? No they were cut to the heart saying ‘what shall we do’ (Acts 2:37). When was the last time you were cut to the heart while hearing the gospel? Have you heard Christ and this call to repent and believe in him with all your heart?

‘When a man has **heard** Christ , Christ and his gospel become the chief things in his life; he is mastered by them, he is governed and controlled by them, he surrenders himself to them, he lives to obey Christ and to obey the gospel’. So writes Martin Lloyd-Jones. To hear Christ is to hear a voice like no other, to hear a call like no other. If you hear, you come; you come to him in repentance, you come to him unconditionally, allowing him to be the new master of your life. Hearing Christ you no longer control your own destiny, he does.

You *have been taught in him* (4:21). ‘Come to me’ says Jesus ... ‘take my yoke upon you and learn of me’ (Matthew 11:28, 29). Are you yoked with Christ? You may think this is a rather crude image. What about my freedom you say. It is in fact a beautiful image of walking worthy of your calling. It demonstrates the humiliation of Christ, his love in coming to you and taking you unto himself. ‘Learn of me’ he said.

Christ has yoked you to himself he has taught you that he died for your sin and was raised for your justification. He has made you into a new person, removing the yoke of bondage and yoking you to himself. You have been taught this glorious gospel and you continue in your walk in Christ. Yoked to him every moment of the day and forever you will find rest, eternal rest for your soul. Is this how you are walking today – yoked to Christ?

Truth in Jesus

You have not so learned Christ ... the truth is in Jesus. Notice the change in names. It is one and the same person of course, but why does Paul change from Christ to Jesus? Jesus is the name given at his birth. *You shall call him Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.* The name reminds us of the Jesus of history, the Jesus who was born into this world. Who walked in this world just as we do yet was without sin? It reminds us of the Cross on which Jesus died. Why did he die? To take away our sin! It reminds us the resurrection. *You seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here he is risen.*

There is one Lord wrote Paul referring to Jesus. Some speak of Jesus as a sort of concept or of many Jesus figures. Some speak as if Jesus was not a real man but a phantom or ghost. Some speak of the Jesus behind the words of Scripture, the ‘true Jesus’ who we cannot know. These heresies all emerged in the early church and continue today. John clearly states *every spirit that does not confess Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God* (I John 4:3).

Jesus is historical and he is also holy. Books and movies have done their utmost to portray Jesus as a sinner. It is good they portray Jesus as historical but he is also holy and without sin. Moreover, Jesus calls his people to be holy as he is holy. That was the whole point of his death. He did not die just so you could stop feeling guilty for your sin; he died that you will turn from sin and be holy.

This is the truth in Jesus. Jesus does not just tell us the truth, he is the truth. You who believe in Jesus are not just following a philosophy, the teaching of a great man called Jesus. You are following a person, a man who is God. You are born again in him, you are united to him, and you walk with him for he is the truth. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and there is no other truth, no other way, and no other life. Is this the Jesus that you have heard and the Jesus you believe in? If so cling to him, remember that yoke and press on in step with him all the way to his home and yours.

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