

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Learning Jesus

by Dan Trygg

“But you did not in this way experientially-learn (implement, put-into-practice, apply, discover) Christ,²¹ if indeed you heard Him and were taught by Him, according as truth is in Jesus,²² y’all to put-aside according to the former manner of life the old self, the one being corrupted according to the lusts of deceit,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and to put on the new self, the one according to God created in righteousness and holy-devotion of the truth.” Ephesians 4:20-24

“Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, to fulfill the word of God,²⁶ the mystery having been hidden from the past ages and generations, but now was manifested to His saints,²⁷ to whom God desired to make known the abundance of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in y’all, the hope of the glory.²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all skill, in order that we may present every person mature in Christ.²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to the inworking of Him inworking in me in power.” Colossians 1:25-29

After writing so much about all that God has done on our behalf, so that we could find life, freedom and come to know God, **Paul focuses our attention on what our response should be.** We ought to live worthily, working hard to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:1-3). There is one body in Christ, the assembly of those who have been called out of the world (and responded), and **we have been recruited to work together to help one another grow and mature in our faith**, our experience of Christ, and become like Jesus in our character (4:12,13). **God has given us spiritual gifts that enable us to serve and build up one another** as we interactively express the reality of the Spirit’s leading in love. It is God’s purpose to tightly fit us together and knit us together in the connective tissue of spiritual relationship, so that the grace He imparts through each member might benefit many others. **As we openly express the leading of the Spirit, we are to grow every aspect of our lives more into Christ**, who is our Source and Completer. Out from Him, we will be led to serve one another, so that **the members of the body, as each one utilizes his or her gift, will build up the body to become stronger and more mature in love** (4:15,16). This is Paul’s vision of the church, a living, interactive group of people who are investing in one another in Christ.

This requires that we **“get real” or “express truth” to one another.** As we will see, as we work further along in this letter, **this will require that we put aside old ways of self-protection in order to “take the risk” to honestly share what God may be prompting us to share.** *Some of us have held ourselves back, out of fear of being rejected, or through lack of confidence.* In order to become a participating part of the team, our contribution is important. *Or, we may have learned strategies to put aside our inner pain, and mentally or emotionally escape through some distraction or sensual experience.* Probably all of us have patterns we have learned to help us “feel better when we feel bad”. The problem is that **these strategies of escape or coping can keep us from dealing with deeper issues that need to be addressed.** By choosing to escape, we avoid dealing with the underlying pain, discomfort, feelings of anxiety or fear, or self-condemnation. **The enemy successfully winds us up in wrappings of deception, accusation or pride that keep us from experiencing the honesty, intimacy and healing of God’s love.** We looked at these dynamics a bit in our previous study (4:17-19). Some are choosing to live in futile thinking, spiritual darkness, ignorance, suppression of the truth, and resistance toward God. They put their pain aside and pursue an escape to sensuality. **There is no healing solution to be found in this strategy. It is only a temporary escape. The underlying problems remain unaddressed.** **AND,** such strategies keep us preoccupied with ourselves. We remain immature, stuck, ...and we are not helping others.

We are to **“no longer” live in that old, futile way.** That is not consistent with a walk with Christ. In fact, **Paul says, “BUT y’all did not in this way learn the Christ...”** This seems like a strange or unusual way of speaking, doesn’t it? **How do you “learn” a person?** There is another phrase that is important: **“...if indeed y’all heard Him, and in Him y’all were instructed, according as truth/reality is in the Jesus...”** **Are you intrigued?**

Before moving farther along, let’s talk about this word, **“learn”.** It is not solely about knowledge. There are other Greek words for “knowing” something. This is more than intellectual knowledge. **This is the root word that “disciple” is derived from. A disciple is more than a student, or an accumulator of facts, ideas, or principles. A disciple is a doer.** He is someone being trained in a skill, or a way of doing something. She is an apprentice. **A disciple is an observer, a hands-on applier, a practitioner.** In Matthew 11:29, Jesus told the disciples, **“Learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.”** **The Lord was exemplifying a mindset and manner of dealing with life. He encouraged His disciples to do as He did.** The apostle Paul said the same sort of thing to the Philippian Christians, **“The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you” (4:9).** **Again, the “learning” was more than facts and information. It was about following Paul’s example and way of dealing with things.** Interestingly, in the previous three verses he had

talked about anxiety, and gave sound counsel as to how to deal with such invasive thoughts. In 4:11, Paul said that **he had experientially-learned to be content, no matter what the circumstances**. Same word. It was not a list of ideas. **It was a skill developed over time and testing**. Again, to illustrate the difference between simply knowing information and applied-learning, note what Jesus said in John 6:45, “**Everyone hearing from the Father and learning comes to Me.**” There are many who hear, and know, but do *not* respond. **Those who respond are those who have learned**. In another example from Hebrews 5:8,9, Jesus “**learned obedience from the things He suffered**. And becoming mature, He became the source of eternal salvation...” Finally, in Revelation 14:3 the **144,000 who were standing in heaven “learned a new song”**. When you think about *that*, ...**learning a song is more than just memorizing the words, or recognizing the melody. You really have not “learned” the song until you can sing it! Learning is about doing!**

So, in Ephesians 4:20, when Paul talked about “*learning* the Christ”, he was talking about becoming like Jesus by following His example and way of doing things. But there is MORE! We are not simply people who are trying to emulate Jesus in our own strength. “What Would Jesus Do?” is a formula for frustration, if we are left to our own abilities. Thank God, that is NOT the case! Let’s break this down a little more.

“But you did not in this way experientially-learn (implement, put-into-practice, apply, discover) Christ,²¹ if indeed you heard Him and were taught by Him, according as truth is in Jesus...” What Paul is saying is that **you did “learn Christ”!** Note the qualifier, “if indeed you heard Him, and were taught by Him”. Interestingly enough, that John 6:45 passage quoted a verse from Isaiah 54:13. Jesus said, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught of God.’ Everyone who has *heard* and *learned* from the Father, comes to Me.” **Maybe you don’t recognize or remember how it was that God spoke to you, ...but if you came to Jesus, then you “heard Him and were taught by Him.” ...And, you responded! What did that mean for you?** If you came to Jesus in faith, and took Him as your Savior and Lord, then you became a child of God, and were born from above. **At that moment a “new you” was born, ...a Spirit-born new person. THAT is “the truth that is in Jesus”! YOU are a new creature, ...and Christ Himself is in you!**

Paul explains the application of this truth in the next three verses. *If* you are indeed a Spirit-born child of God, then **“the truth that is in Jesus” entails that you consciously “put aside the old person and its habitual practices”** (Col. 3:9). **The Greek indicates a moment-in-time, conscious choice**, ...like taking off a set of old clothes and setting them aside. **THAT** is no longer who you are, ...so you are to “no longer” live in those former patterns and ways of thinking. **Notice that Paul treats this as though it were a real thing**, ...at the very least, an established mindset. We know that we still have our old Adam-nature that is “with us”. It will remain something we have to deal with until the day we die, or when Jesus returns, **...BUT, it is not who we are NOW!** The apostle John wrote, “Beloved, NOW we ARE children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him...” (1 Jn. 3:2). **Since we ARE children of God, the “truth that is in Jesus” is that we can set aside who we NO LONGER ARE, and learn to live as the new creatures that we have become in Christ**. Note, too, that **this “old person” is getting worse**. It is “being corrupted according to the lusts of deceit” (Eph. 4:22). This is an observed phenomenon in the lives of alcoholics or addicts. Addiction is a progressive disease. If they get sober, and later on fall back into their addiction. They do not simply go back to the level of use that they were living in when they became sober. No. If they fall back into addiction, they pick up at the level of use that they would have had if they had never gotten sober. The disease progresses, and they go back to a dynamic that had been progressing the entire time they had lived in sobriety. This is true for our sin nature. It continues to get worse. Never underestimate it.

It is not enough to choose to consciously put aside our old self. We must learn to live differently. If we do not know how to do life in a different fashion, we will eventually go back to what we do know. **So, it is critical that we “be being renewed in the spirit of our minds”**. Notice that this is *not* a one-time, point-of-time choice. **This is an ongoing, continuous endeavor**. We need to continue to be renewed and renovated. We need to develop new ways of thinking and new ways of seeing Jesus, ourselves and the world we live in. **We can only do what we know how to do, so we need to apply ourselves to learn new ideas, new options and pursue new ways of evaluating things**. According to Hebrews 5:11-14, a key part of this process is becoming accustomed to the scriptures, and make the effort to apply them in our thoughts and world view, so that we can develop discernment. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:16,17. Again, the type of learning we must develop is not just intellectual, ...it must be applied, implemented, and put into practice.

Alongside of this renewal of our perception is the choice to put on the new person, ...the Spirit-born, indwelt new life that came into being when we came to Christ. Notice that this new person has already been created according to God’s likeness, in holiness and righteousness of the truth. It is *pure*, ...and *only pure*. **It needs to grow and mature through walking obediently with Christ, but there is no sin in it**. It is that new person that will continue on after you die. It is the “you” that will be in the presence of God for eternity. **It IS who you REALLY are, right now!** The choice to “put-aside” the old, and “put-on” the new are momentary choices. **Our choices to invest in our spiritual lives will broaden our understanding, and will strengthen and deepen our ability to habitually walk in that new life.**