

Sermon: Learning Christ Ephesians 4:20-21

Greetings Christ Church of Wiesbaden!

And welcome to our online worship.

I want to invite you to join us not just for the sermon but for the entire worship service.

You can do so by printing a copy of the worship order which is located in the downloads section on the sermons page.

Also, if you would like to view this video in higher resolution, you can do so by clicking on settings in YouTube.

Now before we dive into our study, I want to give you a video update of what has been happening in our church.

Last week we signed a contract to rent a full-time a worship space in Mainz-Kastel.

A newsletter with pictures went out last Thursday and if you didn't get that, just contact us and we'll make sure you get the email.

This new building means that we will be moving locations.

The Rambach church has been great for us in many ways yet, as you know, we have been searching for a full-time space so that we could minister more effectively.

And the rental space in Kastel fits the bill wonderfully.

As you are probably aware, we had hoped to buy a building.

Yet with prices being so high and with the supply of suitable buildings being so low, we felt it best to rent for the time being.

This building will afford us the opportunity to start a German language service, offer Sunday School, do outreach in our community and serve the poor and disconnected.

These are things that we have not been able to do either at all or very effectively.

Our prayer is that God would fill this new building with worshippers and seekers from every type of background and culture:

We want to be able to reach everyone for Christ and this building gives us the opportunity to do so.

Now, we have a challenge before us.

This Coronavirus time will no doubt have an impact on our fellowship.

A good number of our congregation have moved away or will soon move away.

I think of the Leemans, the Carlsons, the Sheilds, the Merz's, Kirsten, Juliana, Jon Walling and many others. I know I'm leaving some people out.

Yet I mention these names to show that we have a challenge before us.

In some ways we will need to re-establish our congregation.

But God is faithful and as we seek to honor him in our work of ministry, He will bring His people in.

And so I encourage you to pray that God would guide our steps during this time of transition.

I also want to encourage you to rejoice in God's provision.

I believe there are many exciting ministry possibilities ahead of us.

And I look forward to seeing some of what God will do!

And now, as we turn to our study of God's word, we are in a passage that tells us why we exist as a church.

We exist because God has called us into being.

We were once in darkness and he has called us into his marvelous light.

In Ephesians 4:17, Paul began a new section in his letter- a practical section where he applies all of the doctrines that he had written about before.

And this section began negatively.

He told us of **all that we no longer** are.

And then after this negative emphasis, he turns positive by reminding us that we have learned Christ.

So that is what we are going to study today: Learning Christ.

Let us read now God's word beginning in Ephesians 4:17.

I am going to read verses 17-24 and our study will focus just on verses 20-21.

Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. **18** They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **19** They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. **20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!— **21** assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, **22** to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, **23** and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, **24** and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

Pray.

Being a Christian is no ordinary thing.

As a matter of fact, we could argue that a being a Christian is the most extraordinary thing in all of creation.

God's creation is filled with wonders.

Think of the beauty of the botanical world.

Think of the variety and mystery of human relationships.

Consider the vastness of space and all that exists in it.

Our universe is filled with wonders.

Yet as amazing as these wonders are, all of them are natural.

Yet a being a Christian is something entirely other because becoming a Christian is a supernatural work of God.

And every time a person is born again, they are born, not of earth or of natural stuff, but directly of God.

A Christian is a miracle and Christians only ever exist because of God's supernatural work.

And Paul wants us to grasp the miracle of our salvation.

He does so in Ephesians 4 by reminding us of what we are not.

We are no longer ordinary.

We are no longer only natural.

We have been born of God.

And our faith in Jesus is just as other worldly as Jesus himself is.

Paul wants to show us who we are now in contrast to who we were.

And he begins with a bleak picture.

In verses 17-19, he describes the Christless person as futile in mind, darkened in understanding, alienated from the life of God and hard hearted.

This is our natural condition.

And the change to our condition comes through Jesus Christ.

He's like a bolt of lightning in the darkest night.

He changes everything and his presence is unmistakable.

And Paul points this out in verse 20.

A sermon outline is available and our first point is the entirety of that verse:

I. But that is not the way you learned Christ!

Now this is an striking statement for a couple of reasons.

First, it comes to us rather abruptly.

It's short and almost startling.

It runs counter to what Paul has been saying in the verses prior.

And so it's a change of gears.

Secondly, it compelling because it begs the question: how does one learn Christ?

Certainly a person can learn **about** Christ or learn the **ways** of Christ.
One can even **get to know Christ relationally** and spiritually speaking.
But to say that we have "learned Christ" is not the way we typically speak.

And Paul know this and that's why he says this the way he does.
He's drawing us in.

Have you ever listened to a song or read a book- and your just humming along and then- out of nowhere- you hear or read a turn of phrase that just stops you in your tracks?

The **unusual** way the words are used pulls you in.
Great writing does this to us.
It compels us to stop and ask, what does this mean?
And that's what Paul does here.
"But that is not the way you learned Christ!"

Now it's an understatement to be sure- a Litotes.
Because the shift from being of this world and only natural to being in Christ and born of God is as stark a contrast as any.
It's a dramatic change of status.

This is what salvation is all about.
Coming out of darkness and into light.

David wrote about this type of dramatic salvation in Psalm 40:

***Psalms 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.***

David was in no neutral state.
He was in a pit of destruction- in a miry bog.
This is his way of saying that his condition could not have been any worse.
But then God rescued him by placing his feet upon a rock.
We might be compelled that think that God merely placed him on solid ground.
But Psalm 40 verse 3 disabuses us of that notion.
David writes:

3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

David's salvation was from the lowest place to the highest place.
And that is what happens to every believer, when they learn Christ.

The words "learned Christ" cause me to think of that most basic element of discipleship.
When Jesus called his first disciples, he did so as their teacher and master.
Their goal was **to become like him** and his goal was to conform them to his image.
And so they followed him everywhere he went, heard his teaching and participated in his works.
Jesus said in Luke 6:40:

Luke 6:40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

This is learning Christ- it means knowing Christ, believing his teaching and participating in the life that he has called us to.

And the element of intimacy in discipleship is unmistakable.

Learning Christ is not just learning about him.

It is **knowing him personally**.

It means having HIS attitude toward the poor rub off on you.

It means having HIS perspective on ambition and worldly pursuits check your own.

It means catching HIS vision for the kingdom.

Learning Christ means becoming a disciple of Jesus in as near a way as possible as his first disciples did.

It means having that feeling of insufficiency like the disciples had before the feeding of the 5000.

At that time, Jesus tested them and said:

“Where are we to buy bread” and “Why don’t you give them something to eat.”

They didn’t have the resources but they soon learned that Jesus did.

Learning Christ means knowing that all the resources we need for what he calls us to are in Him.

Learning Christ means sitting at his feet, figuratively speaking, and hearing him teach the way Martha’s sister Mary did.

Learning Christ means being awed by his power like his disciples were when they were out at sea and he stilled the storm with just a word.

Learning Christ means being shaken out of our tribalism the way his hearers were when he taught the parable of the good Samaritan.

Learning Christ means to have Christ wash your feet, figuratively speaking. It means being humbled that he would serve you in such a lowly manner.

It means being humbled even further that he would die for you and it means rejoicing in his resurrection for you.

To learn Christ means to take him into your life in every way possible so that you, his disciple, like more and more like your master.

This is God’s goal for us.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

So I ask you, have you learned Christ?

Certainly this is more than just trusting in Christ for your salvation.

It refers to becoming his disciple in mind, heart and will.

And so, have you learned Christ?

Is he filing down the rough edges in you?

Is he exposing your self-righteousness and materialism?

Is he causing you to become less of a hedonist and more of a servant?

Is he influencing you to worry less and depend more?

Learning Christ is Paul’s compelling way of referring to Comprehensive Christian discipleship.

And this process of learning Christ never ends in this life.

Paul continues his compelling writing in verse 21 which brings us to our next point...

II. Hearing Christ and Being Taught in Him

Paul begins verse 21 by saying:

21 assuming that you have heard about him...

Why would Paul add this little detail of “assuming that you have heard about him...”?

Certainly anyone who heard the reading of this letter has heard about Christ.

For it would have been in the churches that this letter was read.

To understand Paul's meaning here we have to first recognize that there is no "about" in the original text. His writing is more unusual than that.

The text literally reads: **"Assuming you have heard him..."**

And this shows us that Paul is here referring to hearing Jesus himself.

In John 10:27, Jesus said this:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

This is true, not just for those who heard Jesus audibly in that place and time but also for those who would later read Jesus' words or hear them preached.

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

Jesus is alive and he still speaks to his people through His word and by his Spirit.

I have been a believer for nearly 30 years and I can honestly say have never heard Jesus' voice.

But then again, I can also honestly say that I have.

Because to hear the word of God, either read or preached, and to believe it is to hear God himself speaking.

When the word is preached, taught or read faithfully, then it is God himself who is speaking to us.

This may seem odd, but I believe this is what Paul means here when he writes:

21 assuming that you have heard about him...

Remember, there is no about in the original.

Jesus said:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

To hear God's word in the scriptures is to hear from God himself.

We see this way of speaking at several places in the bible.

When teaching about spiritual gifts, in 1 Peter 4, he wrote about those whose job it was to teach and preach.

Peter writes :

10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God

And this means that inasmuch as the preacher or teacher is faithfully proclaiming God's word, God himself is speaking.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul writes:

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

And so, in our passage of Ephesians 4:21, Paul is telling us that whenever we read the scriptures or whenever we hear the Bible faithfully taught, we are not just hearing an apostle or a preacher.

We are hearing the very word of God.

It is Jesus himself who is speaking to us.

Now this ought to give us a great confidence.

Because just think about it: in our world where there is so much uncertainty, there is a word from God.

He still speaks.

Truth is not just a matter of opinion or experience.

His word is truth.

And because he is alive and because his Spirit is at work, he speaks to us even today.

***1. How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He has said
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?***

Do you want to have confidence?

Do you want to be able to walk into the unknown without being gripped by worry?

Do you want to be able to go against the flow of the culture with a joyful assurance?

Then trust his word.

Christ speaks through His word.

And you who believe have heard him and have been taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.

When Paul writes about being taught in Christ, he is referring to a teaching that is ongoing.

Our learning as Christian never stops.

And yes, this means that we increase in our knowledge and sanctification.

But it also means that we need to be continually taught the basics of what it means to follow Christ.

The commands of God are often quite simple.

Love God, love your neighbor sums them up.

But doing God's word is the hard part.

To embrace God's word from the heart and delight in holiness, we need to be continually taught in him.

One of the most amazing things that I have encountered in myself spiritually is just how unlike Christ I can become.

I mean, I can have a great morning, a great time of prayer and my heart can be set right.

But then, just give it a few hours.

All of those affections have changed and I'm just as worldly as I was the day before, or a week before, or 10 years before.

Now this doesn't mean that I haven't grown or that there is no such thing as progress in the Christian life.

But what it does mean is that we must continually be taught of Christ.

We are imperfect vessels.

We are broken and we leak.

But the good news is that Christ is an ever-flowing spring of life and grace.

And as we are taught in him, abiding in him, then we can be the people he has called to be.

The Christian life is such a daily thing.

I love that in Luke 9, Jesus gave his call to discipleship with the word "daily" in it.

He said:

Luke 9:23 "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Jesus knows how prone we are to wander.

And that is why we need to **daily** return to the shepherd and overseer of our souls.

So do you do this?

Is coming to Christ in his word and through prayer your daily practice?

Are you daily confessing your sins, daily receiving his grace, daily meditating on his truth and His love for you?

In short are you hearing him and being taught in him in an ongoing way?

The truth is in him.

So let us make it a practice to ever be taught of him.

To ever lay ourselves before him in prayer.

To ever listen to his voice and thus be made like our master.

This is the life of those who have learned Christ

Amen.