### **LESSON ONE**

# LEARNING CHRIST AS THE TRUTH IS IN JESUS & HAVING PUT OFF THE OLD MAN AND HAVING PUT ON THE NEW MAN

# Scripture Reading:

- **Eph. 4:17** This therefore I say and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk in the vanity of their mind,
- **Eph. 4:18** Being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance which is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;
- **Eph. 4:19** Who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness in greediness.
- Eph. 4:20 But you did not so learn Christ,
- Eph. 4:21 If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus,
- Eph. 4:22 That you put off, as regards your former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit,
- Eph. 4:23 And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind
- **Eph. 4:24** And put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality.

#### **Questions:**

#### Section 1

- 1. What is the daily walk of gentiles? How is it different to the believers?
- 2. What are the reasons for gentiles to be alienated from the life of God?
- 3. What is the meaning of 'being past feeling'?

#### Section 2

- 1. What is the significance of the Lord Jesus setting up a pattern with His life on earth?
- 2. What does it mean to 'learn Christ'? When did this happen to us?
- 3. What does it mean that 'the reality is in Jesus'?

#### Section 3

- 1. What does it mean to merely imitate Christ versus 'learning Christ'? What are the two aspects that allow us to learn Christ in a real and inward way?
- 2. What have we been 'taught in Christ' as revealed in Eph. 4:22-24? Explain how according to baptism this is already an accomplished fact.

#### Section 4

- 1. What is the process of being renewed in the spirit of our mind? What does this fulfill in our experience?
- 2. Referring to Ephesians 2 and Colosians 3, why does the new man not refer to individual christians but to the church?
- 3. What type of church life will we have as we put off the old man and put on the new man?

#### [Section 1]

# I. THE THIRD ITEM OF A WALK WORTHY OF GOD'S CALLING

In 4:1 Paul beseeches us to walk worthily of the calling with which we were called. The first item of a walk worthy of God's calling is to keep the oneness, and the second is to grow up into Christ the Head. The third item is to learn Christ as the reality is in Jesus.

# II. NO LONGER WALKING AS THE GENTILES

Verse 17 says, "This therefore I say and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk in the vanity of their mind." This word indicates that what the apostle is about to say is not only his exhortation but also his testimony. What he exhorts is what he lives. Because he himself lives the kind of life he intends to describe, in his teaching he gives us a testimony.

## A. Walking in the Vanity of Their Mind

Paul's exhortation is to "no longer walk as the Gentiles...walk in the vanity of their mind." The Gentiles are the fallen people, who became vain in their reasonings (Rom. 1:21). They walk without God in the vanity of their mind, being controlled and directed by their vain thoughts. Whatever they do according to their fallen mind is vanity; it is all without reality. The life of fallen mankind is a walk in the vanity of the mind. All the worldly people today walk in such vanity. In the eyes of God and in the eyes of the apostle Paul, whatever the people in the world think, say, and do is nothing but vanity. None of those things is real or solid—everything is empty. As believers, we should no longer walk in the vanity of the mind. Instead, we must walk in the reality of our spirit.

#### **B.** Darkened in Their Understanding

According to Ephesians 4:18, the Gentiles who walk in the vanity of the mind are "darkened in their understanding." When the mind of fallen people is filled with vanity, their understanding is darkened regarding the things of God.

#### C. Alienated from the Life of God

The Gentiles are also "alienated from the life of God" (v. 18). This life is the uncreated, eternal life of God, which man did not have at the time of creation. After being created, man with the created human life was placed before the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9) that he might receive the uncreated divine life. But man fell into the vanity of his mind and became darkened in his understanding. Now, in such a fallen condition man is not able to touch the life of God until he has his mind turned to God, until he repents and believes in the Lord Jesus to receive God's eternal life (Acts 11:18; John 3:16).

God's intention in His creation of man was that man would partake of the fruit of the tree of life and thereby receive the eternal life of God. But in the fall, Satan's evil nature was injected into man. As a result, man had to be barred from the tree of life. According to Genesis 3:24, the Lord "drove the man out, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life." Thus, man was alienated from the life of God. The cherubim, the flame, and the sword signify God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. These three things kept sinful man from receiving eternal life. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled all the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. Therefore, through the redemption of the Lord Jesus, the way has been opened for us to contact the tree of life once more. This is the reason Hebrews 10:19 says that we have "boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus." The tree of life is in the Holy of Holies. As believers in Christ, we have been brought back to the tree of life. Now the divine life in the Holy of Holies may be our daily enjoyment. The Gentiles, however, are still alienated from the life of God.

## 1. Because of the Ignorance Which Is in Them

One reason for this alienation is "the ignorance which is in them" (Eph. 4:18). *Ignorance* here means not only a lack of knowledge but also an unwillingness to know. Because of the hardness of his heart, fallen man does not approve of knowing the things of God (Rom. 1:28). Due to this, his understanding is darkened so that he does not know God.

The unbelievers have no knowledge of God or of spiritual things. Furthermore, they are not willing to gain this knowledge. What a mercy that we not only have the proper knowledge but also have the desire to know! It is a great blessing to have

within us the desire to know God, to know life, and to know spiritual things. Before we were saved, we did not have this desire. We, like the Gentiles, lacked both the knowledge and the willingness to know. But now we hunger and thirst to know God. The more we can know of Him and of the divine life, the better it is. Any Christian who does not seek to know the Lord cannot be happy or satisfied. To seek the Lord and to seek to know life and the things of God is a source of great happiness. This is the reason we are so happy in the church meetings. It is also the reason that I have an inward joy when I minister the Word to the Lord's people. Something of the Lord has been sown into us to give us the desire to know Him.

### 2. Because of the Hardness of Their Heart

Another reason the Gentiles are alienated from the life of God is the hardness of their heart. The hardness of fallen man's heart is the source of the darkness in his understanding and the vanity of his mind. Before we were saved, we also were hard of heart. We seemed to be impenetrable, and God's words could not enter into us. This is the situation of unbelievers today.

### D. Being Past Feeling

Furthermore, in his thorough diagnosis of the condition of fallen man, Paul points out that the Gentiles are "past feeling" (Eph. 4:19). The word feeling here refers mainly to the consciousness of the conscience. Hence, being past feeling means not caring for one's conscience. After man fell, God ordained that man should be under the ruling of his conscience. But instead of regarding his conscience, fallen man gave himself over to lasciviousness and greedy lust. Because the unbelievers refused to care for the feeling of their conscience, eventually the conscience stopped functioning. Therefore, the feeling within them ceased.

# E. Having Given Themselves Over to Lasciviousness

Moreover, they give themselves over to lasciviousness "to work all uncleanness in greediness" (v. 19). They are given over to lusts that cannot be satisfied. If we look at the situation in the world today, we will see that unbelievers have given themselves over to lasciviousness to work uncleanness in their unsatisfied lust.

#### [Section 2]

#### III. LEARNING CHRIST

Verses 17 through 19 are a dark background for what Paul says in verse 20: "But you did not so learn Christ." The New Testament strongly indicates that we should live Christ. In Philippians 1:21 Paul declares, "To me, to live is Christ." But here in Ephesians 4:20 we are told that we have learned Christ. Notice that Paul uses the past tense in speaking of our learning Christ. He also uses the past tense in the next verse, which says, "If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus." This matter of learning Christ as the reality is in Jesus is difficult to comprehend, and we need to consider it very carefully.

Christ is not only life to us but also an example (John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21). We learn from Him (Matt. 11:29) according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life. According to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus did not come into us as life directly. Rather, after living on earth for thirty years, He ministered for another three and a half years. During the thirtythree and a half years of His life on earth. He set up a pattern, a mold, a model. This is a matter of great significance. One reason the four Gospels were written was to show the pattern of the life that God desires, the mold of the life that can satisfy God and fulfill His purpose. For this reason the New Testament gives us a unique biography, the biography of the Lord Jesus, written from four directions. After the Lord Jesus set up the pattern revealed in the Gospels, He was crucified on the cross, and then He entered into resurrection. It is in resurrection that He comes into us to be our life.

According to the New Testament, to be saved is to be put by God into Christ. First Corinthians 1:30 says, "Of Him you are in Christ Jesus." When God put us into Christ, He put us into the mold. Just as a sister shapes dough into the form of a mold, so God intends to form us into the mold of Christ. Hence, Romans 8:29 indicates that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, the Firstborn among many brothers. To be conformed is to be molded. The Firstborn is the pattern, and the many brothers of the Firstborn are those who are to be conformed to this pattern. To learn Christ is simply to be molded into the pattern of Christ, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ.

By means of baptism God has put us into Christ, who is the pattern. To be baptized is to be placed

into Christ as the mold. Both Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 speak of being baptized into Christ. To be baptized into Christ is to be buried into Him. The tomb of this baptism is the pattern, the mold. In God's eyes, we were put into this mold when we were baptized. Through being placed into the mold, we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. By being buried into Christ, we have been brought out of Adam and the old creation. By baptism we have been put into Christ, who is both our life and our pattern. This explains why Paul uses the past tense in speaking about learning Christ. We learned Christ when we were buried into Him in baptism. This means that to learn Christ is to be put into Christ as the mold. It is to be molded into the pattern set up by Him during His years on

After Christ established the pattern, He was crucified, and then He entered into resurrection, becoming in resurrection the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). It is as the Spirit that He comes into us to be our life. We have pointed out that at the time we believed in Christ and were baptized in Him, God put us into Him as the pattern, the mold. Therefore, Paul could tell the Ephesians that they "did...learn Christ." According to the light of the New Testament and according to our experience, to learn Christ is to be placed into Christ by God. On God's side, He has put us into Christ. On our side, we have learned Christ by being put into Him.

After a person is saved, deep within him he desires to live a life in the pattern established by the Lord Jesus. However, many either ignore this desire or cultivate it in a mistaken way, thinking that by self-effort they can succeed in imitating Him. It is a mistake to think that we can imitate Christ by the exercise of our natural life. The believers in Christ should imitate Him, but they should not do so according to their natural life.

The reality in Jesus is the real situation of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. In the godless walk of the Gentiles, the fallen people, there is vanity. But in the godly life of Jesus, there is truth, reality. Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God. God was in His living, and He was one with God. This is what is meant by *the reality is in Jesus*. We, the believers, who are regenerated with Christ as our life and are taught in Him, learn from Him as the reality is in Jesus.

We have pointed out that it is a mistake to endeavor to imitate Christ by the efforts of our natural life. We have also seen that when we believed in the Lord Jesus and were saved, God put us into Christ as the mold. This mold is the life of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels, a life absolutely according to reality, truth. Truth is the shining of light, the expression of light. Since God is light (1 John 1:5), truth is the expression of God. Every aspect of the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels is an expression of God. In everything He said and did, He expressed God. This expression of God is the shining of light; hence, it is the truth, the reality. This life of Jesus according to reality is the pattern in which God has placed us. In this pattern we have learned Christ as the reality is in Jesus. This means that we have learned Christ according to the reality shown in the Gospels, that is, according to the life of the Lord Jesus, which was wholly according to God's reality, God's truth. This life is the shining of light. The shining of the light is truth, and truth is the expression of God. Therefore, in the life of Jesus there is truth, reality. The essence of the pattern set up by the Lord Jesus is reality. This means that the essence of the life of Jesus is reality. We have learned Christ as the reality is in Jesus.

The truth, the reality, in Jesus in Ephesians 4:21 is in contrast to the vanity of the mind in verse 17. The Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, but we believers live a life as the reality is in Jesus. When the Lord Jesus was living on earth, He never walked in vanity. Rather, He always walked in reality, in truth, that is, in the shining of the divine light. This means that the Lord Jesus lived and walked in the expression of God. We have learned Christ according to this very reality that is in Jesus.

#### [Section 3]

# HAVING PUT OFF THE OLD MAN AND HAVING PUT ON THE NEW MAN

In His thirty-three and a half years on earth, the Lord Jesus formed the mold, the pattern, to which all those who believe in Him are to be conformed. According to the record of the four Gospels, the life of the Lord Jesus was a life of truth. Truth is the shining of light. Light is the source, and truth is its expression. As Hebrews 1:3 says, the Lord Jesus is the effulgence of God's glory. This means that He is the shining of God who is light. Because in every aspect of the Lord's living on earth there was the shining of light, His life was a life of truth, a life of the shining of God Himself. That life of truth was the very expression of God. For this reason Paul says that we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus. In other words, we learn

Christ according to the mold of the life of Jesus. The mold of the life of Jesus is the truth.

After Christ established this mold, He passed through death and resurrection, and in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. As such a Spirit, He comes into us to be our life. When we believed in Him and were baptized, God put us into Him as the mold, just as dough is placed into a mold. By being put into the mold we learned the mold. This means that by being put into Christ, we learn Christ. On the one hand, God put us into Christ; on the other hand, Christ has come into us to be our life. Now we may live by Him according to the mold in which we have been placed by God.

Not many of us may realize the influence the four Gospels have on us. When we read in the Gospels of the mold formed by the Lord Jesus, that mold spontaneously influences our living. As we love the Lord, contact Him, and pray to Him, we automatically live Him according to the mold described in the Gospels. In this way we are shaped, conformed, to the image of this mold. This is what it means to learn Christ.

Learning Christ in this way is altogether different from taking Him as an objective example and endeavoring in our natural life to imitate Him. God has put us into the mold formed by the life of Jesus on earth. Simultaneously, Christ as the life-giving Spirit has come into our being as life. The more we love Him and contact Him, the more we live Him according to this mold. As a result, we are spontaneously conformed to the image of that mold. Therefore, with Paul we can say, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). We live Christ in the form of His own life, in the form recorded in the Gospels.

We must distinguish this kind of living from that according to the modernistic teaching regarding imitating Christ as our example. The modernists falsely teach that Christ is not God, but a man who established the highest standard for us to follow. This teaching requires that we exercise our natural life to imitate Christ and to live up to His standard. Such a teaching is heretical. It has absolutely nothing to do with the truth as it is in Jesus. It denies the fact that a true believer is in Christ and has Christ in him. In contrast to this heretical, modernistic teaching, we say according to the New Testament that when a sinner repents and believes in Christ and is baptized into Christ, God puts this one into Christ as the mold. At the same time, Christ as the life-giving Spirit comes into him to be his life. Thereafter, this believer is to live by Christ as his life according to the mold. The more he lives by Christ, the more he will be

spontaneously shaped into the form of the mold. This is a life in Christ and also a life of Christ in us. We are in Christ as the mold, and He is in us as our life. In this way we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

Ephesians 4 covers three items concerning a life worthy of God's calling: keeping the oneness (vv. 1-14), growing up into the Head (vv. 15-16), and learning Christ as the truth is in Jesus (vv. 17-32). Concerning the learning of Christ as the truth is in Jesus, Paul firstly exhorts us and testifies to us that we should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind (v. 17). Instead, we should walk in the life that is according to the truth in Jesus. The Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, but we walk in the reality expressed in the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. In His life we see reality, truth, the shining of light, the expression of God. As the believers in Christ, we are to walk in such a reality.

Verse 21 says that we have been taught in Christ as the truth is in Jesus. Verses 22 and 24 show us what we have been taught: that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. We were taught this when we were put into the mold, that is, when we were baptized. In baptism we were taught that our old man has been crucified and that he is to be buried by baptism. Furthermore, we were taught that as we come out of the water, we are resurrected into the new man. Therefore, by baptism we were taught that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man.

At this point we need to consider Romans 6:3-5. Verse 3 says, "Are you ignorant that as many as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" To be baptized into Christ Jesus means to be put into Him. Furthermore, through baptism we have been buried into Christ's death. In verses 4 and 5 we see the mold. These verses indicate that through baptism we were taught that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. This is the normal Christian experience.

Normally, as we preach the gospel to sinners, we tell them of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Then we encourage those who are willing to believe in Christ to receive Him into them as their life. The next step is to baptize them. This indicates that we put them into Christ as the mold. Thereafter, they are to live by Christ according to the mold. By baptism they have been taught that they have put off the old man and have put on the new man. By being buried through baptism, they learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

We should not try to understand verses such as 4:20-24 through the exercise of our natural mind. Rather, we need to consider them in the light of our Christian experience. If we do this, the light will gradually shine upon us, and we shall see the truth. The truth here is that when we were baptized, we were taught that we have put off the old man and that we have put on the new man. Notice that Paul does not say that we have been taught to put off the old man and to put on the new man. No, we have already put off the old man and have put on the new man. Our old man was buried in the waters of baptism. Hence, we have put off the old man. Furthermore, as we rose up from the water in resurrection, we were clothed with the new man. Hence, we have also put on the new man. Therefore, we have been taught in Christ as the truth is in Jesus that we have put off the old man and put on the new man.

#### I. A CONDITION OF LEARNING CHRIST

Having put off the old man and having put on the new man is a condition of learning Christ. This is utterly different from the devilish, modernistic teaching which says that Christ established the highest standard of human living and that we must endeavor to copy Him and to live up to this standard. If we would learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus, we must fulfill the condition of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. This is not a superficial truth.

# [Section 4]

#### II. HAVING PUT OFF THE OLD MAN

#### A. As Regards Our Former Manner of Life

Verse 22 says that we have put off, as regards the former manner of life, the old man. The former manner of life was a walk in the vanity of the mind. Such a manner of life has been terminated and put away.

#### B. The Old Man

Verse 22 also says that the old man "is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit." The old man is of Adam, created by God, but fallen through sin. The article before the word deceit is emphatic and indicates that the word deceit is personified. Hence, deceit here refers to the deceiver, the Devil, from whom are the lusts of the corrupted old man. The old man is corrupted according to the lusts of the Devil, the deceiving one. Outwardly, the manner of life of the old man is a walk in the vanity of the mind. Inwardly, the old man is corrupted according to the lusts of the Devil, the lusts of the deceit.

This old man was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6) and was buried in baptism (Rom. 6:4). Hallelujah, we have put off the old man in baptism!

#### III. BEING RENEWED

Between the word regarding the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man, Paul wedges in the thought of being renewed in the spirit of our mind (v. 23). Based upon the accomplished facts of the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man, verse 23 tells us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. To be renewed is for our transformation to the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The spirit here is the regenerated spirit of the believers mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled spirit spreads into our mind, thus becoming the spirit of our mind. It is in such a spirit that we are renewed for our transformation. In this way our natural mind is conquered, subdued, and put under the spirit. This, of course, implies a process of metabolic transformation. As this process takes place, the mingled spirit enters our mind, takes over our mind, and becomes the spirit of our

By the spirit of the mind we are renewed to fulfill in experience what was accomplished in the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man. The putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man are accomplished facts. Now we must experience and realize these facts by being renewed in the spirit of our mind. As these facts are realized in experience, we live a life that corresponds to the life of Jesus. This means that we live a life of truth, a life in the shining of light and in the expression of God. When we are renewed in the spirit of our mind to execute the fact of having put off the old man and having put on the new man, we live a life according to the truth that is in Jesus.

#### IV. HAVING PUT ON THE NEW MAN

#### A. Corporate

The new man is of Christ. It is His Body, created in Him on the cross (2:15-16). It is not individual, but corporate (Col. 3:10-11). The fact that the new man is created of two peoples proves that it is corporate. Furthermore, Colossians 3:10 and 11 reveal that the new man is a composition of many different peoples. In this corporate new man there is no Greek or Jew, no bond or free, no barbarian or Scythian, but Christ is all and in all. In Colossians 3:11 the word "all" refers to people. This means that in the new man Christ is all the people and is in all the people. Therefore, in the corporate new man Christ is all and in all.

The book of Ephesians reveals that the church is the Body of Christ (1:22-23), the kingdom of God, the household of God (2:19), and the temple, the dwelling place of God (2:21-22). It reveals further that the church is the new man. This is the highest aspect of the church. The Greek word for church, ekklesia, means those called out for a gathering, hence, an assembly. This is the initial aspect of the church. From this the apostle goes on to the aspects of fellowcitizens of the kingdom of God and members of the household of God. These are higher than the initial aspect, but not as high as the aspect of the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the new man is still higher than the Body of Christ. Thus, the church is not just an assembly of believers, a kingdom of heavenly citizens, a household of God's children, nor even a Body for Christ. It is in its uttermost aspect a new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life; whereas as the new man, the church needs Christ as its person. This new corporate person should live a life as Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of truth, expressing God and causing God to be realized as the reality by man. Hence, the new man is the focus of the apostle's exhortation in this section (vv. 17-32).

## B. Created according to God

Verse 24 says that the new man was created according to God. The old man was created according to the image of God outwardly, without God's life and nature (Gen. 1:26-27). But the new man was created according to God Himself inwardly, with God's life and nature (Col. 3:10).

# C. In Righteousness and Holiness of the Truth

Furthermore, the new man was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness is being right with God and with man according to God's righteous way, whereas holiness is being separated unto God from anything common and being saturated with God's holy nature. Righteousness refers to the outward acts, whereas holiness refers to the inward nature. Outwardly everything related to the new man is righteous; and inwardly everything related to the new man is holy.

The righteousness and holiness of the new man are of the truth. The article before truth in verse 24 is emphatic. As the deceit in verse 22, related to the old man, is the personification of Satan, so truth here, related to the new man, is the personification of God. This truth was exhibited in the life of Jesus, as mentioned in verse 21. In the life of Jesus righteousness and holiness of

truth were always being manifested. It was in the righteousness and holiness of this truth, which is God realized and expressed, that the new man was created.

Deceit is the Devil, and truth is God. The old man is according to the lusts of the Devil, but the new man is in the righteousness and holiness of God. It is a serious mistake to render the Greek word for truth here as an adjective. The King James Version made such a mistake in adopting the rendering "true holiness." Here Paul's concept is not that of true holiness but that of the holiness of the truth. Holiness here is the holiness of the divine Person. The new man was created according to God in the righteousness and holiness of God Himself.

In order that we might learn Christ, Paul presents a sharp contrast between the old man and the new man, between the Devil and God, and between lusts, on the one hand, and righteousness and holiness, on the other. We have been taught that we have already put off the old man and have put on the new man. This means we have put off the lusts and the falsehood of the Devil and have put on the righteousness and holiness of God. This God is the truth, and this truth is seen in the living of Jesus on earth. The human living of Jesus was according to the truth, that is, according to God Himself, full of righteousness and holiness. Praise the Lord that we have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus!

If we learn Christ by putting off the old man and by putting on the new man, we shall be in the church life, for the new man actually is the church. If we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus, then we can have a genuine, proper, and practical church life.

#### References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 46 & 47