

Opening Words

Christ is renewing us so that we will let go of the practices of darkness. God has delivered us from our solidarity with the old man, Adam and brought us into solidarity with the new man, Jesus Christ, and he tells us that the Holy Spirit is renewing us at the very deepest core of our identity.

169 Eph The Old and the New

The Lord gives us many reasons to follow Him, but I have discovered one of the greatest is understanding the status we have in him. When we understand that we are in him, that we are now his adopted children, that we are not guilty anymore, that there is no longer any condemnation and that this old status in Adam is gone forever, it motivates me to move forward in my relationship with him.

This life is superior to the old life in paganism. We have looked at Paul's description of the old life outside Christ and contrasted it with the new life that Christ offers. Light is better than darkness, purpose is better than futility, understanding is better than ignorance, softness of heart is better than hardness of heart, and purity is better than sensuality.

We have learned Christ, we have heard Christ, and we have been taught that all truth is in Jesus. Now, as we move forward in the text we are going to see Paul tell us that the reason we are not to live as the pagans live is that we have a new identity and a new status in Jesus Christ. Let's begin reading in Ephesians 4:20 and I will take it through verse 24.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of God* has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth

Paul, in these verses, focuses on the central truth he wishes to remind believers. They are not to live as the pagans do because that is their former manner of life. That is their old self, their old life, their old identity. They have put on a new self, a new life, and have a new identity.

The translation of these verses is difficult to render into English and some faulty theology has made them even more difficult because it has caused us to come to these verses with an incorrect perception of human nature, what Christ has done for us, and what we are to do. I am going to have to spend some time in this broadcast walking through some of the wrong ideas, that many have cherished, but which are not borne out in the text.

First, is the idea that this passage and others teach that we believers have an old nature within us and that at regeneration we receive a new nature. I know this has been taught a lot in Christian circles by well-intentioned teachers but when you think about it, it really doesn't make much sense to say that we have two natures within us. We believers have one nature within us. In fact, everyone

has one human nature within us. It's quite simple. This one human nature was made in the image of God, was polluted by sin, and as the passage says, experiences corruption according to the lusts of deceit. But when a person is born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live within our one human nature, makes us alive in Christ, and rebuilds our human nature so that we increasingly reflect the image of God.

A second wrong idea many get from this passage is that Paul is telling us to lay aside our old nature and to put on our new nature. This fits in with an idea that some old nature within us was crucified with Christ, yet still somehow sins, and that by faith we are to put off the old nature and by faith put on the new nature. But Paul is not telling us that. Please hold on while I give a little bit of a grammar lesson here. If Paul were telling us to put off some old sinful nature he would have used an imperative, a verb that expresses a command. If he were telling us to put on our new nature, he would also have used an imperative, a verb that expresses a command. And the English certainly looks that way and sounds that way. When one reads the passage, it appears that Paul is commanding us to lay aside the old self and to put on the new self.

But the Greek text does not allow that. Instead, Paul says that our old self already was laid aside and that our new self already has been put on. He uses what is called an aorist tense to express past completed action. Your old life was laid aside. It has been done. It is finished and completed. Your new life was put on. Your old identity was discarded. Your new identity was given to you. And when did this happen? Although Paul does not say it in the text, we can only conclude that because he is talking about past completed action, he is referring to the moment when a person expressed his faith in Jesus Christ and was baptized into his death and resurrection.

Paul uses similar terminology in Romans 6. Listen to these familiar verses.

do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin.

Here, Paul says that our status in Adam died with Christ. We died with Christ. We were buried with Christ and we have been raised with Christ. Our old man, not something inside us but our guilty association with Adam was crucified with Christ so that the body of sinful evidence, that is, the certificate of death might be done away. Thus, we are no longer are slaves to the penalty of sin because when a guilty man dies he is justified from all his sin. This enables us to be a new man, a new person with a justified standing before God. Because of this we can present ourselves to God as those who have been raised from the dead.

But the main point I wish to make about this is that it is a done deal. It is not something we have do repeatedly. Our old guilty status is dead and gone. Our new righteous standing that God created for us in Christ Jesus is the only way God looks at us. And this is what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4. He

is telling us that the old man, the old identity with Adam, has been laid aside and that the new man, our new identity with the Lord from heaven has been put on. When you came to Christ that transaction occurred. You were freed from Adam and connected to Jesus. You were freed from guilt and condemnation and connected to righteousness and freedom.

And this, my friends, is what Paul means when he says we learned and heard and were taught about Jesus Christ, that in reference to our old life, that old guilty sinful life is now considered by God to be dead and gone. When you came to Christ it was done away with and now a new righteous and holy standing before God has been created for you.

But if all this happened to us once and for all at salvation, what is happening to us now? What are we experiencing now? What is God doing for us now? This is what verse 23 is about and Paul tells us that God is renewing us in the spirit of our mind. Whereas verses 22 and 24 are aorists and talk about past completed action, verse 23 is a present tense and tells us what God is doing in our life now. Because our old identity and guilty status is dead and gone, and because he has created a new justified standing in righteousness and holiness, God is renewing us at the very core of our being.

Notice that he says, “the spirit of your mind,” and not just “your mind.” Paul does this because he realizes the problem is not just with our thinking processes. The problem is much deeper. Remember when we were looking at the darkness of the pagan world and Paul’s various descriptions of it? Paul used three terms to deal with the mind – he spoke of a futile mind, a darkened understanding, and ignorance. But we discovered that that was not the core problem. The core problem was hardness of heart. At a very deep level, people rejected the truth and their heart became calloused. This caused a darkened understanding and a futile way of thinking. And if this is the case with humanity, then this requires that God change us at this very deep level at the spirit of our mind. Christ has come to change our thinking at this deep level – at the level of our heart, at the level of our motivation. And Paul says this is what is happening with us – Christ is renewing the spirit of our mind.

Christ is renewing us so that we will let go of the practices of darkness that bring corruption in accordance with the lusts of deceit. God has delivered us from this solidarity with the old man, Adam and brought us into solidarity with the new man, Jesus Christ and in keeping with this solidarity he tells us that the Holy Spirit is renewing us at the very deepest core of our identity.

Considering all that God has done for us, do we have any responsibility? This is what Paul will explain in verses 25 and following and which we will pick up in our next lesson. For now, let me say, that I realize we have gone into some deep theology today and have cut across the grain of some traditional thinking in Christian circles. May I encourage you to get a copy of my book, *Dead Men Rising*, and work your way through my exposition of Romans 6 which explains it all? I hope you will. I hope you will take the time to go deep with the word of God and come to understand the great work Christ has already done for you when he died and rose on your behalf. It is his death and resurrection and our association with those saving events that gives us our new justified standing before God and enables the Holy Spirit to make his changes in us. As we embrace our new status in Christ, may we yield to him and allow him to renew us in the spirit of our mind.