Opening Words

Christ is the substance of our message. Christ is the speaker of the message. Christ is the beginning and the end, the all in all, the totality of everything.

168 Eph Christ and Christ Alone

It is so important that we learn to be faithful to the text of Scripture. It is so important that we learn the word of God. It is important that we learn it because the darkness around us grows ever greater and as followers of Jesus we must be the bright light that the world desperately needs to see.

Paul describes the new life in Ephesians 4:20-24.

> 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.

In verses 20-21 Paul uses three words to describe the conversion experience of every believer. He says we learned, we heard, and we were taught. They are all past tense. They point to something that happened in the lives of the believers when they learned the Gospel of Christ, heard His voice, and were taught that the truth, that reality, is found in Jesus.

Let's consider this a bit today. First, Paul says they learned *Christ*. Christ was the substance of the message they heard. They did not hear principles. They did not hear a philosophy. They did not receive an 8-step path to enlightenment. They did not receive the 5 steps to paradise. And they did not hear the ten commandments of Moses. I hope you realize what I have just done. I have presented some of the options that were available to people in Paul's day and which are still available today.

You see, in Paul's day there were other travelling speakers who would come to cities and proclaim their message. Some were Cynic philosophers. Some were Stoic philosophers. They preached their version of their good news, but, ultimately it was a philosophical system they were calling people to and not to a person. Paul says, you learned *Christ*.

When I referred to an 8-step path of enlightenment I was using the Buddhist message. They call people to follow 8 steps to enlightenment which results ultimately in the abolition of self and the merging of everything into the great oneness of all. Your goal is to lose yourself! But in Christianity, we call people to find their self, their true self in Christ and our message is not 8 steps of enlightenment but one step to Jesus and loving him with all our hearts. Our message is about a person.

When I referred to the 5 steps to paradise I was referring to the message of Islam which includes confessing Allah as God, that Mohammed is his prophet, and that we are to pray 5 times a day, give

alms to the poor, and a make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Those are the five steps of Islam. But what we call people to is a living relationship with Jesus Christ where we can pray to him all day long in a loving conversation, and, rather than travelling to one place, we can worship God in spirit and truth anywhere and anytime as we confess that there is one God and Father of all, one Lord Jesus, and one Spirit and that these three are one. We are calling people to a person and not to steps.

And so, Paul says in this phrase in 4:20 that we learned *Christ*. It's all about him. The best commentary on this is Colossians 1:15-20 which I read to you from the New Living Translation:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.
He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,
16 for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.
He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—
such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.
Everything was created through him and for him.
17 He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.
18 Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.
He is the beginning,
supreme over all who rise from the dead.
So he is first in everything.
19 For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
20 and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.
He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

This is what we need to preach – in modern vocabulary of course – and in relevant ways. We need to preach the supremacy of Christ. This is what Paul said they learned. This is what we were supposed to learn. This is what we should teach and preach to the lost.

Paul has a second phrase. He says you *heard* Him. Christ is not only the subject of our message, Christ himself is also speaking through us as we proclaim the Gospel message to others. I referred in a previous study to Acts 26 and Paul's defense before Agrippa. Let me read it again.

> So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

Paul says that Christ is the one proclaiming light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. But we know that Christ is not on earth physically proclaiming the Gospel. Christ is at the right hand of God, and will remain there until every enemy is beneath his feet. So, in what way is Christ proclaiming light to the world? He is doing it through his gifted people. He is doing it through all his people. This takes us back to Ephesians 4:7-11 where we saw Paul's exposition of the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God. We learned that one of the first things he did was to give gifts to people who would then take those gifts and use them to do his work in his name in the world. One of these gifts was apostleship, and men like Paul preached in new areas and laid the foundation of churches. Paul believed that the resurrected, enthroned Christ was speaking through him. In fact, Paul says exactly this in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us." Imagine, God Himself, Christ himself speaking through us! Paul has this emphasis in Acts 13 when he was on an apostolic mission. In Acts 13:46-47 we find these words, "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"

What is remarkable about this passage is that it is a quote from Isaiah 42 and 49 and those verses are prophecies of the Messiah! Paul is applying Messianic verses to his ministry, not because he thought he was the Messiah. Far from that! But because he knew that the Messiah, Jesus, enthroned at the right hand of God, was speaking through him to the people.

And so, Paul says in Ephesians 4:21, "you have heard Him." When you heard us preaching and responded to our message of Christ, we want you to know that you were really hearing him. And brothers and sisters, this is the perspective we should have as we talk with others about our Savior. We should realize that Christ is speaking through us to the world. And if our pastors are humble, godly men who spend time with him, when they speak to us it is Jesus Christ speaking to us about our lives.

Paul has one more verb that he uses. He says in 4:21, "you have been taught in Him." You learned Christ. You heard Christ. And you were taught in Him, and what was it that you were taught? You were taught that truth is in Jesus. This is a profound statement with huge implications for Christians today. He says that truth is in Jesus. And by this he does not mean "spiritual truth" only, or "how to go to heaven when we die," but he means all truth is in Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth gives all truth about everything. This is a worldview statement. Paul is saying that that man, Jesus of Nazareth, was the embodiment of truth for the world.

Of course, Jesus said that as well. You know the familiar verses in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." "I am the truth," Jesus said. "I am the truth about everything. I am the truth about God. When you see me, you will see what God is really like. I am the truth about humanity. When you see me, and see my complete devotion to the Father and my obedience to his will, even to death on a cross, you see what a true human is. When you see my devotion to his cause to get the good news to every nation of the world, you see what life is about."

Wow! There is a lot in these two little verses: Ephesians 4:20-21. Christ is the substance of our message. We learned Christ. Christ is the speaker of the message. We heard him. He speaks through his messengers. Christ is the beginning and end, the totality of everything. We have been taught that truth (all truth) is in Jesus.

May God help us at WGS Ministries and may God help you, may God help all our churches to be completely Christ-centered. When we become this way, we will leave the practices of paganism and its darkness and walk in the light of the new life to which Christ calls us.