

# The Transformed Life

## Ephesians 4:20-24

Most of us have seen the time-lapse photography of a lowly caterpillar becoming a butterfly. The footage usually starts with a cumbersome little worm inching its way along a leaf that it devours. It looks silly and awkward as it labors to cover short distances.

When it gets to about two inches in length, it takes a break from stuffing itself, finds a protective branch, and rigs up a silk thread by which it fastens its tail to that branch. Once secured, this little caterpillar begins to contort its body, gyrating in curious ways. At first, it's unclear what is happening. Then suddenly, the outer skin of this worm seems to unzip revealing a green cocoon within. Minutes later, the molting is done and the green pod that is left becomes motionless for about 14 days.

Nothing seems to be happening for awhile. It appears to be dead. But then on about day 12, the walls of the greenish cocoon become transparent. For the first time we can see that something dramatic has happened inside. But it's not until a day or two later that the full story is told. All at once, the little creature within begins to struggle and push until finally the shell of its miniature incubator cracks open.

Pushing itself out of the impossibly small pod there comes a beautiful butterfly. Wet, trembling, and dark, it takes a few minutes to unfold itself, opening its collapsed wings for the first time. It forces them outward to their full capacity, spreading patterns of color and symmetry on this new canvas. And then this ex-earthbound caterpillar seizes the wind and lifts off, delicately managing the currents like a poem set in motion.

It is one of the wonders of God's world that such drastic transformation takes place. Where there was once an ugly, cumbersome grub, laboring to get to the next leaf, there is now this magnificent butterfly that bears no resemblance to its former self. We almost can't take our eyes off it as it flits from flower to flower in such an effortless and magical way.

What would it be like to go through such drastic and amazing changes? To be changed from the slow-moving treadmill existence that seems so pointless into someone who soars with purpose and joy! To conquer the cycle of sinning with the accompanying accusations of Satan so that you experience being freed from sin! To become so much more than you once were through the extraordinary inner work of the Spirit of God!

The Bible says that this miraculous inside out change is the experience of every true believer! Our choir just sang about the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, how three days after He suffered and died for us on the cross, God raised Him from the dead—and He is alive today and forever!

And here is the wonderful good news! Because Jesus lives again, He is able to give a new life to you. You don't have to continue crawling around like a caterpillar in your sin. Last week we studied Ephesians 4:17-19 where Paul painted a grim picture of the old, futile, caterpillar-like life of a person without

Jesus. He said they live “**in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart**” (Ep 4:17, 18).

That bleak picture describes each of us before we met Jesus Christ. In verse 20 Paul draws a sharp contrast, “**But you have not so learned Christ.**” He’s saying, you don’t have to keep living that unfilled, futile life, crawling around looking for something to satisfy that deep emptiness within. God can transform your life to be like that of His Son, Jesus.

Listen to Ephesians 4:20-24:

- 20 But you have not so learned Christ,**
- 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:**
- 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,**
- 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,**
- 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**

My simple point today is this: *The transformed life is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ.* It is coming to know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Through His death and resurrection, we can have a new life!

## **New Life Is Coming to Know Christ Personally (Ep 4:20, 21).**

Paul describes the transformed life in four ways:

### **A. The changed life begins when you learn Christ.**

Paul says, “**But you have not so learned Christ,**” or, “you did not learn Christ in this way,” (NASB). What way? In the dead, empty, futile way of the world that he has just described in verses 17-19. It’s a whole different way of thinking that brings you to Jesus.

What does he mean, to “**learn Christ**”? He is saying that to become a Christian is a matter of coming to know Christ personally. Yes, you must know something about who He is, as revealed in Scripture. The entire Bible testifies to the truth of who Jesus is, that He is the Christ (Messiah, God’s anointed One), the Son of God. He is the eternal God in human flesh. You must also know something about the significance of what He did when He died on the cross as the substitute for sinners. He satisfied God’s wrath toward our sin, so that we are free from condemnation when we trust in Christ to save us. You must know about His resurrection, that we celebrate today.

But it is possible to know all of these facts and more and yet not to know Jesus Christ personally. In John 17:3, Jesus prayed, “**This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.**” The Christian life begins when you receive eternal life from God through faith in Jesus Christ. At that moment, you come to know Him personally. If you have not

entered into that personal relationship with Christ, you are not a Christian in the true sense of the word. The changed life begins when you learn Christ.

## **B. The changed life begins when you hear Christ.**

Verse 21 begins, **“If indeed.”** That “if” does not express any doubt, but rather assurance. The NIV translates this verse, **“Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.”** Paul is saying, “I know that you have heard Him.”

Let me ask you, have you heard Him? Have you heard Jesus and been taught in Him? None of us were there in Galilee or Jerusalem to hear Jesus when He was on earth. Paul means that when he and others preach the gospel, we hear it as God speaking to us. God still opens sin-deafened ears so that people can not just listen to words, but they can hear Jesus Christ calling them to Himself.

In John 8:43, Jesus asks the Jews that were challenging Him, **“Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.”**

And then Jesus goes on to identify the root problem, that they were of their father, the devil. Satan had deafened their ears so that they could not hear Christ’s words of eternal life in order to believe and be saved. The changed life begins when God opens your ears to hear Jesus Christ in the gospel and respond with obedient faith.

Are you hearing God calling you today? Do you hear not just the words of this poor preacher—are you hearing Christ speaking to your heart?

## **C. The changed life begins when you are taught in Christ.**

Here Paul again uses one of the key phrases in this letter to the Ephesians, **“in Him.”** The phrase “in Christ” sums up Paul’s view of what it means to be a Christian. As we saw in chapter 1, the saints are **“faithful in Christ Jesus”** (Ep 1:1). We have received every spiritual blessing **“in Christ”** (Ep 1:3). God chose us **“in Him”** before the foundation of the world (Ep 1:4). **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins”** (Ep 1:7). He made known to us the mystery of His will, which He purposed **“in Him”** (Ep 1:9). **“In Him”** we have obtained an inheritance (Ep 1:10, 11). **“In Him”** we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ep 1:13). God’s surpassing power towards us was revealed **“in Christ”** when He raised Him from the dead (Ep 1:20). All that in Christ! And these are just the ones in chapter 1!

So, to be **“taught in Him,”** means to be taught from the standpoint of this new relationship with Christ that entails this new position in Christ. Before, you stood outside, not understanding the things of God. But now, because of God’s mercy and kindness toward you in Christ, you are **“in Him”** for time and eternity. To be taught in Him is a lifelong process that begins at the moment of salvation, but never ends. Since Christ is the center of all of Scripture, to be taught in Him is to grow to know the glory of Christ in His person, His offices, and His work on our behalf. Someday when we see Him as He is, we will be instantly changed to be like Him (1John 3:2). Meanwhile, we must engage in the process of being taught in Him.

## **D. The changed life begins when you know the truth that is in Jesus.**

Verse 21 ends with the phrase, “**as the truth is in Jesus.**” Jesus is the embodiment of truth. He said, “**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,**” (John 14:6). The truth of salvation is only in Jesus Christ. In Him, we learn the truth about who we are, the truth about sin and righteousness, and the truth about God’s purpose for why we are on this earth. We learn the truth about how to love God and how to love one another. We learn the truth about the coming judgment, and about heaven and hell. All of the truth that we need for life and godliness centers in the person of Jesus Christ.

I want you to notice that Paul here makes a deliberate shift in how he refers to Christ. In Eph. 4:20, he talks about learning *Christ*, but here he says that the truth is in *Jesus*. This is the only time in Ephesians that he uses the name Jesus by itself. Why did Paul not say, “just as the truth is in Christ”? I think the change is more than stylistic. The name “**Jesus**” focuses on the historical person who was born of the virgin Mary, who worked as a carpenter, and who walked around Israel teaching and healing the sick. He was crucified, raised bodily from the dead, seen by many of His disciples after the resurrection, and ascended bodily into heaven. All of these historic facts lie behind the name, “Jesus.”

The truth of the gospel is rooted in history. The Christian message is the proclamation of certain facts that happened in history in the person of Jesus. If the gospel accounts are fictional stories, then there is no salvation in Jesus! If the historic person of Jesus did not die on the cross and rise bodily from the dead, as testified by many reliable eyewitnesses, then you are still in your sins (1Co 15:17). Everything in the Christian faith rests on the truth being in the historical person of Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead!

The changed life stems from the transformation that God works in us through the gospel. When we meet Jesus Christ personally through faith, we are changed people! And next week we will see how that change process continues.

I know that people are here in this church every Sunday morning for a variety of reasons. Some are here out of a sense of religious obligation. But that won’t transform your life. Some of you are here for fellowship and there is nothing wrong with that. But fellowship alone won’t transform your life. Some of you are here for information. But having an intellectual understanding of the Bible won’t transform your life. You need Jesus.

This morning I simply want to ask you, has God begun that change process in you? Do you know Jesus Christ personally? If not, here’s the ABCs of how to know Christ and be saved:

A – Admit to God you are a sinner, repent and turn away from your sin and selfishness.

B – Believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who died for your sins and was raised to give you life.

C – Confess your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Make a once-for-all decision to trust Christ to save you.