

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 18, 2009

Experientially Learning Jesus

by Dan Trygg

"But you did not experientially-learn Christ in this way..." (Eph. 4:20)

Ephesians 4:20 is set in contrast to vs. 17-19. In those verses **Paul warned the believers to no longer live the way that unbelievers (lit., Gentiles) live, ...in vain, empty thinking**, ...in separation from the life of God because of ignorance and hard-heartedness, ...by stuffing their pain, and medicating themselves with an unending pleasure-search.

After describing what to avoid, he reminds the Ephesians that they "did not *experientially-learn* Christ in this manner". It is important to see that, **first of all, he is not talking about simply intellectually coming to a belief in Jesus**, i.e., hearing the gospel and assenting to the idea that Christ came to die for our sins. **The word translated as "experientially-learn" (Gk. - *manthano*) is a verb meaning "to learn by doing** or experiencing, to discover by investigation, to find out by inquiry, to acquire a skill or ability by virtue of *use, practice, or training*" (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). You *could* endlessly think and intellectually learn information without *ever* "experientially-learning", "personally discovering", or implementing anything (cf. Jn. 6:45; II Tim. 3:7). Paul is not talking theology. He is focusing in on personally, practically finding out who Jesus is *for us* in daily life. ***Manthano* is from the same linguistic root as the word "disciple". A disciple is an active follower, a pursuer, an implementer, someone who is always trying to put their faith into practice**, ...a doer of the word, not just a hearer (Jas. 1:21-25). The first contrast between the vain, empty thinking of unbelief versus the life of faith is the active, experiential, "choosing-oriented" nature of discipleship.

Furthermore, he plainly states that **we did not, and will not, discover Jesus in a practical, personal, applicable way by approaching life by the old methodology we used to live by**. The phrase, "in this manner", or "in this way", refers to the ineffective, ignorant, atheistic, avoidance-oriented approach to life which characterized the old "pattern of life". Paul is contrasting two very distinctive *modus operandi*, i.e., ways of dealing with life.

"...if indeed you heard Him and were taught in/by Him, according as the truth/reality is in Jesus" (4:21)

Paul seems to be saying, "If you really did correctly hear Jesus, and if you were accurately taught the truth concerning Him, you would know what I mean when I say that it is not in accordance with that 'former manner of life'." His use of the past tense draws our attention back to the choice we made in becoming a disciple of Jesus. **What was the original proposition which we were confronted with? Was it not the reality that we had made a mess out of our lives, or that we could see that we were sinners, and needed to give ourselves to God to be led by Him?** Jesus' expression of this in Matt. 16:24-26 could be translated in it this way, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him/her deny/disown/disregard himself, and take up his/her cross and follow Me. For whoever might wish to save his/her life/soul/self shall lose/ruin/destroy it; but whoever might-lose/bring-to-nothing/put-to-death/be-deprived-of his/her life/soul/self for My sake will find/discover it. For what will a person be profited, if he/she gains the whole world, and forfeits/loses his/her life/soul/self? Or what will a person give in exchange for his/her soul/self/life?"

What is the point of Jesus' teaching? Is it not that *our lives are valuable*? Instinctively, naturally, we know that, ...and somewhere deep inside we want to be all that we can be. **We want to preserve, fulfill and keep safe who we are. The rub is, according to Jesus, that anyone who attempts to do this on his or her own will spoil themselves.** Their lives, their individual strengths, qualities and unique abilities will not come to fruition. They will waste themselves, and somehow in the process they will even lose or destroy who they really are. For all the talk about death to self that occurs in religious circles, isn't it interesting that **annihilation of self is not at all what Jesus had in mind?** In fact, the goal of the process Jesus is advocating is that we will ultimately find our "self/soul" and "guard/keep/protect it unto/into age-type (eternal) life" (Jn. 12:25). **The point is, however, that we cannot effectively manage our own lives.** We do not have the perspective, -- either about life, eternity, or even our own selves --, to begin to successfully "live life to the full". Bottom line, **Jesus says that the only way to ultimate self-discovery, self-preservation and self-fulfillment is through giving God the authority to direct all of our affairs.** We must disregard our selfish interests, our self-directed lives, "in this world" in order to discover and preserve our true selves. At some point, that is the proposition all of us must face who will follow Jesus. We must give Him the right to call the shots for us. We must voluntarily give our *selves* to Him to develop, direct and dispense. In the giving away of our lives, we begin to find a new, better life, ...a life that will be abundant, rich, and full.

"...you (for yourselves) to put away (at a point in time) {according to the former habit-patterns/conduct} the old person, the (one) [presently, ongoingly] being corrupted/ruined/destroyed/led astray/seduced according to the strong-desires of the deception, (4:22)

Paul moves on to delineating **what experientially learning the "truth in Jesus" for my Christian walk entails**. He describes three steps here in Ephesians. In Romans 6, however, he includes another step, which precedes these. In that passage, he first lays down the **"together-with" foundation**, i.e., how **we were united with Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection** (vss.1-11). He writes, "...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" (vss. 3,4). **This identification together-with Jesus is the basis of our deliverance and freedom from the power of the sin that is resident with us**, "the former person (old man) was crucified with Him *in order that the body of the sin might be 'idled down'/disengaged/ made ineffective*, in order that we might no longer serve-as-slaves to the sin" (vs. 6).

[Neither Eph. 4 nor Rom. 6 teach that sin's presence in our lives has ceased to be. In both passages, it is spoken of as *still being present with us*, even though *it is no longer who we are*. The Eph. passage says that the "old man", or former self, is still being corrupted, or ruined by deceitful strong-desires. Rom. 6 teaches that it was crucified with Christ. Whatever that means, it obviously does *not* mean it has ceased to exist. It has been "nailed to the cross", so to speak, ...but it can still have some kind of influence on us, if we allow it to. It is still present with us, but its co-crucifixion with Jesus somehow has made it possible for the "body of sin" to be disengaged, or rendered ineffective.]

In Rom. 6:7, the apostle emphasizes the importance of *dying in order to be finally freed* from the bond of sin. This teaching of co-crucifixion, co-burial and co-resurrection is taught clearly and repeatedly in the NT (Rom. 6-8, Gal. 2:19-21; 5:24; 6:14-16; Eph. 4:21-24; Col. 2:6-14,20-24; 3:1-17). **The idea of the "identity change" produced by this union with Christ is basic to understanding and applying "the truth that is in Jesus" in Ephesians 4.**

This brings us to the four steps Paul advocated in order for us to *experience* "the truth that is in Jesus":

(1.) "Reckon yourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). The word, "reckon", literally means "add it up (for yourselves)", "draw the conclusion (for yourselves)", "(for yourselves) consider yourselves". **We are commanded to make a mental shift in regard to our self-perception. This is a choice, not a feeling.** God commands us to "(for yourselves) look upon yourselves as corpses toward sin on the one hand, but on the other hand living (ones) toward God by/in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11; cf. Col. 3:5). Again, this is a *command*, not an *option*.

(2.) "Put off the old person" (Eph. 4:22). Paul makes it quite specific, "according to the former habitual pattern of life" In other words, **you put off the old person by putting away its former practices**, i.e., don't give yourself to do as you used to do. In Colossians 3, Paul uses the same word to "put aside" former attitudes and behaviors (vss.5-8), while using a different word picture for putting off the old person (vs. 10). The word used is to "unclothe yourself from/strip off/undress yourself from" the old person. Note the connection of the next phrase, "with its evil practices". **To put off the old person is an identity shift that also requires you to put aside old attitudes and behaviors.**

(3.) "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (Eph. 4:23). If you *are* a new person, with a new identity and new Holy Spirit power resident within you, then **you need to learn how to view and live life differently**. The Greek words convey both the notion of *restoration of something lost or spoiled*, as well as of *building new thought patterns and obtaining a perception of reality which is entirely fresh*, something which did not exist before (Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:10). **This does not happen overnight, and requires conscious effort on our part.** *We must have new information to think differently*, and we also *must take control of our thought life* to stop old thought patterns and assert new ways of thinking (II Cor. 10:4,5). Thus, **this step requires not only learning new information, but also the choice to think differently**. The NT repeatedly speaks of studying God's word, of watching the example of others, of the value obtaining input from others, and of directing your thoughts in profitable ways as practical steps to bring about change (II Tim. 3:16,17; II Thess. 3:7; Eph. 4:15,16; Phil. 4:6-9).

(4.) "Put on/clothe-yourselves-with the new person" (Eph. 4:24). What does this mean? Paul gives us a clue by saying that this new person "has been created in righteousness and true holiness". In other words, *there is a new life, a new identity resident within us*. It is the result of new life which is born from above (Jn. 3:3-6). Although we may not always see or feel it (I Jn. 3:1,2), this new life *is* our new self, our new identity. It is Christ's life in us, instead of our old self-life (Gal. 2:20). We need to consciously "put it on", because we are not used to living from that new inner self. Paul says that this life "*has been created in righteousness and true holiness*". Instead of being sinful, it *is* righteous. **As long as we abide in the power of Christ in us, ...as long as we operate from this new inner nature, it will be natural for us to live righteously. It will come from within.** Just as a tree bears fruit according to its nature, Jesus said that a good person will produce good behavior. **Learning to tune in to that new nature, and the leading of the Spirit within, requires conscious choice and devoted discipline.** God will teach us, *if* we will walk with Him.