

The School of Christ

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Preacher: Rev. Malcolm Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again now to Paul's letter to Ephesians and chapter 4, and we can read at verse 20. Ephesians chapter 4 and at verse 20.

But that is not the way you learned Christ, assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and through righteousness and holiness. And so on. I guess when we come to the gospel of Jesus Christ and try to summarize something of what the gospel says, there are various statements in the Bible which help us to do that.

And one of the great summary statements in God's purposes is in Leviticus chapter 11, where he says, You shall be holy, for I am holy. In other words, God has a people, he saves a people, and they are going to be like himself.

They are going to reflect him in the world. And Peter takes up the same idea in his own epistles. So there is the overriding purpose of God that you and I are going to reflect who we are by our behavior, by our attitude, and by how we're going to live our lives.

[1 : 36] And of course, we all know that if we're going to do that, we have to know something first of all about what God is, about what God has done, and about what God requires.

In other words, before we start the practice of anything, we have to learn the doctrine and the teaching. And we see Paul as a master of that whole process.

In all of his letters, he gives us teaching, and then he gives the practical application. And it's no different in the section itself. In this letter itself, he speaks first of all about the privileges that are theirs as those who are the children of God, saved by God's grace, up until chapter 3, verse 20. But then, he wants them to know how to live as Christians in the world. And today I want us to think about that especially.

What is it in this section that Paul draws their attention to that helps us to understand what it is like to live as Christians in the world?

[2 : 45] Because that was important in the days of Paul and Ephesus. Why was it important? It was important because the culture in the days of Paul and Ephesus was in danger of influencing the church of Jesus so that it was going to lose its effectiveness.

And the only response to that is to ensure that the people of God are so immersed in the doctrines of Jesus that they will be the ones who will do the influencing.

And of course, in our own culture, in our own society, it is no different. That's the danger. Are we going to influence our culture more than our culture will influence us?

And if we are Christians, according to the way that the Bible speaks of Christians, the church will be influential in the world in which it lives. I want us to notice first of all in a passage that we see the school of Christ.

In verse 20 that we read, that is not the way you learned Christ. They were learners. In other words, they were disciples.

[4 : 02] In other words, they were directing the whole of their minds, the whole of their lives, the whole of their thinking, doing one thing. And the basic idea of being a disciple is that I'm binding myself to someone else so that I will learn something from them.

And it's a life commitment to the person who is going to be my teacher. So I'm coming to learn, and I'm coming to learn in the school of Christ, and I'm coming to learn with a heart that is ready to hear, a heart that's ready to be influenced by, a mind that is going to learn the theory so that then I can go and put the theory into practice.

And today, if I'm a Christian, that's the kind of person I am. I didn't come in here reluctantly. I didn't.

I wasn't forced to come in here. I wanted to come here to worship God today because my mind is captivated by the Lord Jesus. My mind wants to be filled with the truth about the Lord Jesus. I want to bind myself to him so that I will learn from him and so that my life will be changed by him. Is that why you came in here today?

[5 : 21] Are you here demonstrating that it is your desire, above everything else, to learn in the school of Christ? And one of the interesting things when we come to the school of Christ is that Christ himself is the lesson.

It is his school. It's a private school. It belongs to him. His name is over the door. But when we come into this school, he himself is the lesson. That is not the way you learned Christ.

He is the whole of the curriculum. He is the one and only subject. And every other subject is learned through him. He is the person who fills the textbook.

Learning Christ. Learning Christ. And when I think of Jesus Christ as the lesson, it brings me back to the great statement of John in chapter 1, where he reminds us that no one has seen God at any time, but that the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has revealed him.

And so the lesson is about Christ. But the lesson which is about Christ is the lesson which is about God. And I come to learn about Christ, and I'm learning about God.

[6 : 50] And Christ is in the bigger picture of the purposes of God. And in that sense, it brings me right back to the very purposes, to the very plans of God.

That before you and I ever were, that before this world was ever created, that God had a plan. And that God so loved the world, the lost people in it, that he sent his Son into the world.

Everything about Christ takes me back to the very fountain of our salvation, to the very purpose of God, and to the covenant, the relationship between the Father and the Son, who sent his Son into the world for a particular purpose.

A remarkable lesson. A remarkable subject. A complete curriculum that I find taken up only in the passion of Jesus.

And John goes further, and he elaborates in his own peculiar kind of language. Grace and truth came with Jesus. What do I see in Christ in this lesson?

[8 : 00] I see the heart of God moved for a lost world, moved for people like you and me, to rescue us from our sin, and to raise us up from the pit of sin, and to give us a status and a place in his own family.

Everything that God has purposed for his children is to be found in Jesus. Are you here today wanting to know the secrets of God?

Secrets in the sense that they are things that are hidden until we have them revealed in the passion of the Son of God. It's your mind so given over to learning in the school of Christ that it is everything for you today to know about him, to know him, and to learn the truth that comes through his passion alone.

He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the one described here in verse 21 as the truth is in Jesus.

The pupil coming to the school. And the school itself, the school that we come to as Christians, it is quite remarkable.

[9 : 36] He himself is not only the subject, but he himself is also the teacher. That is not the way you learn Christ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him.

Assuming that you have heard him, we're coming to learn about him and we're going to learn about him as we listen to him. No teacher has ever done that.

No school has ever reached that level of passing knowledge that the teacher is teaching about himself in order to give the pupils the information that they need.

It's a unique school. If so, that you have heard him. And that's all about our enrollment into the school of Christ. That we come into the school of Christ because we have heard his call, we have heard his summons, he has brought us from darkness into life, we are enrolled into his school by his grace and by his power and we are here today as the children of God by virtue only of his saving grace in us.

Jesus speaks of the fact that you must be born again. Paul speaks about himself being an ambassador for Christ and he speaks about appealing to others to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

[11 : 08] He speaks to the Corinthians with regard to the way in which they have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God. Hearing the teacher.

It's like my first day in school and the head teacher is summoning me into the school and I'm enrolled into the school at his summons and his very summons has carried with it the power itself that has taken me from where I was and taken me to the threshold of his school and that's what the call of the gospel does.

It arrests my heart. It forgives me for my sin. It puts the spirit of God in my heart and as soon as that happens I'm a person in motion.

I cannot stay where I was. I'm united to Christ. by his saving grace alone and I step over the threshold and here is my teacher and because of his work in bringing me there I am now ready to hear him and to listen to him and there is something quite personal in that.

Parents will take their children from their homes and will present them at the school to be enrolled there and to become part of the life of the school. But here today for the child of God for the Christian it is my heavenly father who finds me out there wandering in the world and by his power he lays hold of my heart and lays hold of my life and as my father in heaven who has taken me as his child he carries me into the school of Jesus Christ over the threshold.

[13 : 03] a personal intervention a personal salvation a personal carrying and handing over to the school of his own son.

Do you know what that means today to be the child of God who can go to the moment or the time or the period of time perhaps when you were enrolled in the school of Christ and he became attractive to you you were drawn by him there was a power working in your life that has changed you and turned you around and caused you to focus on him alone and in that moment there was the fatherly care of God there was the preciousness of Jesus Christ and there was the willingness and the readiness to learn the school of Christ he is the subject he is the teacher but remarkably he is also the environment

I come to hear about him I come to learn from him and I also understand that assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him that's quite remarkable that the environment the classroom the place where I find the school of Christ is not outside of Christ so that he is here and the school is over here separate from him in actual fact he himself is the school the person himself who is all of the subject of the school is himself the environment in which I'm going to learn him and that is the essence of me being a Christian that Paul repeatedly reminds us that when we become Christians we are no longer outside of Christ we are in Christ a relationship with him in the day of our enrollment in the kingdom of

God it's a relationship through which we are in him and if we can just in a pictorial way if we can imagine ourselves in a city full of streets of gold of places that I can stop and listen and learn and think of the beauty of such an environment that it is full of everything that I want that's something of what Paul wants us to see in Jesus we are in Christ and Christ is in everything I see around me and everything I want you to know is I find it in the school I look to his lips to hear what he has to say I look to his heart and I see the love that he has for me I look to his feet and I see the places that his feet took him to I look around me and all I see is the beauty of Christ and the subject is so so gripping and so marvelous

I cannot be distracted it's all about who he is the school of Christ and in the school of Christ every day is a school day I'm never going to be out of the school anymore I'm so secure in the school in Christ united to him that nothing can separate me from him I'll spend the rest of my life learning in the school of Christ whose school are you and yourself can you look and and in the symbolic way can you look and see that you're enrolled in the school of Jesus that you have heard his summons that you have felt his power that you've been melted by his love and because of all of these things you are here today and you have come to learn more about him not because you haven't been learning the days leading up to here and because you won't be learning the days after here every day is a school day but your desire is to learn about him the school of Christ born into his kingdom learning about him and learning about the

[18 : 07] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son secondly if there is the school of Christ the school of Christ is the school of change and that's what was vitally important in Ephesus and in all of these cities and the change is quite simple we can think of a school uniform but it's quite simple because there is the laying aside of their past and that is the taking up of something new and the moment that I'm enrolled in the school of Jesus I go through this changing

process where I leave my past behind and I show myself to be something completely different and that's what we see in verse 22 to put off your old self and of course that has something to do especially with our relationship with God and what was true about our old relationship with God it was simply broken and in that broken relationship we were separated from him and in our separation from him we lived the kind of life that Paul describes here we lived it in sin in the service of sin and living a life like the world and he's speaking to

Gentiles who were right outside the kingdom of Israel that's where you were taken from that old self and if that was what it was by practice by status it was a place of condemnation it was a place of death and it was a place of slavery to sin the old self the life from which flowed every sinful action every sinful thought and a lifestyle that was the opposite of what was required of the people of God and Paul is saying with regard to that lifestyle now that you have put it off putting off a garment going into the changing room and laying down their clothes that's what we read happens at the death of

Stephen they lay down their clothes when it was all over there is that taking off and in this moment of coming to be united with Christ there is the putting off of all of the life that we lived placing ourselves in the service of sin living in a godless way separated from the kingdom of God and having nothing to do with the promises of the Lord Jesus the former life putting it off and if there was one thing that was going to be really damaging to the church on Ephesus in the day in which Paul was writing to them if there was one thing that was going to be harmful to the church of Jesus it was that if there was such a thing as a Christian who thought that they could live as a living in the past and still be a

Christian it is just not possible to do that the minute that we become united to Christ the old man we can think of putting the old man off but we can certainly also think of the old man falling away it's the rags of my old life they simply fall off the day that I come to know the Lord Jesus today if I'm a Christian who's in the school of Christ wanting to learn about him because he's changed my life and yet I go out there tomorrow and my life is no different to the people around me in the world doing everything that they are doing then there is not just the serious question about witness and light but there is the serious fundamental question about me belonging to the school of Christ at all because it is in the very nature of becoming a Christian that that falls off that I leave that behind a life lived in the service of sin I leave these garments behind what is your relationship today with the world in which you live as the child of God how different are you to those who are outside of the kingdom and have no place for the Lord Jesus how different are you the former lifestyle and we could say if it falls off we could say that it is replaced and displaced by the new lifestyle to put off your old self which belongs to your foreign manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires and put on the new self created after the likeness of

[24 : 14] God and getting ready for the school of Christ whatever I was doing before whatever my occupation whatever my past times were before it's no time to get ready for school it's no time to change change the way that I present myself it's no time to change into his uniform putting on the new self and what's the new self like it's a new self that looks like Jesus it's a new self that serves the Lord Jesus it's a new self that's devoted to Jesus it's a new self that has left darkness behind and that now walks in the light it's a new self that has left the condemnation of sin behind and has entered into the freedom of the children of God it's a new life where there is that sense of going over the threshold and entering into a way of life that is the way of life for which

I was made in the first place and I enter into it and it is my absolute and complete freedom he has set me free and like I said at the very outset if there is one thing that summarizes the purpose of God for his people in the world it is that you shall be holy because I am holy and that's the new person a different life devoted to God a holy person in the words of God to Moses in Exodus 19 you will be my treasured possession if you obey my if you obey my voice and keep my covenant you will be to me a holy nation a royal priesthood you will be my treasured possession and there is nothing in life that can compare with realizing that we are the treasured possession of God and that's what we are when we come into the school of Christ and in this new life that we are living we are there learning from him and it's where we want to be and our lives show that that's where we want to be it's a life of devotion to him and today that's where

I find myself challenged because we know that it's easy for the child of God to be the child of God on the Lord's day but we know that there are challenges to be faced we know there's a life to be lived we know there's a world that is alienated from God and that's the challenge to make my

Christianity to make my life of devotion one that is certainly lived in the presence of God in the worship of his name but one that follows me every step that I take in life so that wherever I go the newness the oldness will always be confined to my past and the newness of life devoted to him will always be evident and if every day is a school day in the life of the

Christian every day is a school uniform day in the life of the Christian and we know that many organisations sages nowadays they have a special dressing down day where the uniform is laid aside and they wait what they please for perhaps one day in the month there is no such thing in the life of the Christian there is no dressing down day what I am today is what I should be tomorrow all of my life consistently devoted to the son of God as a disciple of his learning from him in his school the curriculum for excellence that works out in my life and shows me to be different every day is a school uniform day and thirdly the school of Christ the school of change and the school of grace because the change that God brings about it's not a change that begins and ends in a moment it is a school of grace where grace works from that day onwards and we see the way in which Paul goes on to speak about that in verse 24 and to be done the new self created of the likeness of God and through righteousness and in holiness it is a new creation what do I see when I see a Christian I read at the beginning of my Bible that there was chaos the earth was without form and void and God said let there be light and there was order when I come to look at the Christian's experience I see exactly the same there was chaos there was lack of order there was a void but in the day of the grace of God he created something new he said let there be light and there the Christian stood and shone because the Christian was light in him the creative grace of God light in and when I hear God saying in the first creation let us make man in our image after our likeness he creates

[30 : 32] Adam and he blesses him and he speaks to him in the paradise of the garden of Eden and I come to think of the Christian and I hear God saying something very similar let us make man in the image of our son of you my son let us make man in the image of Jesus Christ and by the spirit of God he makes the Christian he creates a new person and who is that new person like he is like God in the image of God but he is especially like Christ as Paul said in Romans 8 that was his whole purpose in verse 30 that you might be conformed to the image of his son the creative power of God the beginnings of a new life that looks like

Jesus that's lived out like Jesus that's lived out the way in which Jesus would live in righteousness and in holiness a life that's conformed to the norms of the kingdom of God a life that is righteous lived in God's covenant and a life that is holy set apart for God and so that when I see Jesus in the gospel and they marveled at him because he was so different I need to see the Christian in the same way because they are different in the world the Christian is set apart in that way as the handiwork of God having the fingerprint of God having the presence of God having the power of God and having the love of God poured out in their hearts created in Christ

Jesus for good works says Paul in chapter 2 and verse 10 a creative grace and today if you are a Christian if you are the child of God you will sense that there is a power working within you that is dynamic and powerful that is bringing about a change every day and that will at last transform you into something that you were not before so I'm darkness in my old self I come into the kingdom of God I'm light in my new self and that's not an end in itself it's the beginning of the process of transformation of making me like the son of God renewed in 23 renewed in the spirit of your minds made young made new we're not getting any younger but Paul speaks about the inside being renewed day by day this power is dynamic on my inside and wherever

God takes me having enrolled me in the school of Christ wherever he takes me in the school it is bringing about a change and in the school of Jesus he will take me into rooms and down corridors and to places that I didn't think was part of his school and I will marvel sometimes with great joy at where he has taken me because of what I learned there and he will take me to other places and I will marvel at the depths into which he took me and I will learn something more there but in his school he's taken me from one classroom to the other as he transforms me and changes me more and more into his own likeness until at last the school of Christ is a school where every day is a school day every day is a school uniform day until at last we reach graduation day and graduation day is exciting my children are being presented with their awards my children are going from one class to the other they're going from primary school to high school there is that graduation and I watch the Christian in the school of Christ led through the rooms and the classrooms and every avenue through which Jesus takes them as they learn their lessons in the lower school in the

primary school of their education and then

Jesus says they've learned as much as they can in this school I need to take them to the higher school of my higher education and Jesus prays in John 17 I will father that they whom you have given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory and I see them in that higher school with Jesus still as their teacher in Revelation chapter 7 and I listen to what John is seeing and here he sees the lamb in the midst of the throne shepherding them and leading them to fountains of living water a higher education and graduating to that place of eternal bliss and blessedness where there is more to learn and where our minds will be expanded more and more in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus a Christian in the world in the school of Christ in the school of change in the school of grace and a Christian on the way to glory to the school of glory where Christ will be seen face to face where we'll see him as he is and continue to learn from him it's your life making a difference it's your life helping to influence the culture in the world in which you live or is the culture in the world in which you live influencing you because you're not learning because you're not developing and because you're not more and more Christ-like and more holy in the life that you live may God help us to live for his glory and to learn his lessons and to be like him and to ultimately graduate as those who will enter in to his eternal glory may he bless his word to us let's bow our heads in prayer