

Holiness: The Sufficiency of Christ

Hello church, open to (Eph 4)

- Prayer
- READ: Eph 4:17-24

This passage is about How someone changes. I'm pretty sure I don't need to give some long intro trying to convince you that **people can change**. You know that, everyone knows that. We all believe "*People can change*" –I'm not interested in talking about people changing (as some BIG general truth). ---Here's our focus today, and what really matters: **Can you change?**

We all believe people can change, but the question is: **Can you?** --- (and let me push this a step further) b/c we'd all be quick to answer, "*Yeah, I can change.*" But...

- I'm talking about that area of your life that you've confessed to the Lord hundreds
- I'm talking about that thing in your life you're most ashamed of.

Maybe it's (sexual sin, homosexual desires, maybe substance abuse, drug addictions, can't put your phone down, anger problems, over-eating & eating disorders, or anything else you can think of). You say, "*What about this?*" Yes, even that.

- Maybe it's something you were born with?
- Maybe it's something you conditioned yourself into the habit of doing?
- Maybe it started last year, or maybe 30yrs ago?
- Maybe you've prayed about it for years, struggled with it for years
- Maybe it feels like it's part of you, like it's going to be with you until you die.

Go there mentally for a minute... think of those things that (hurt you, hurt others, dishonor God)

And I'm asking, "Do you really believe you can change (in that area)?" –true freedom! –victory! –done!

- I'm *NOT* talking about someone else's problems
- I'm talking about **your** problems, **your** issues ---Can **–you** –change?

Because... guys, what are we doing right now studying all this, if it doesn't change us? If there's no hope for change? And maybe I should back up and ask us –**Q) Do you even want to change?**

Many times Jesus would go up to someone and ask "*Do you want to be healed?*" –and I used to think of course they do! What kinda question is that? ---But I've learned the wisdom in Jesus' question, b/c many times people need change, but they don't want change. They're headed down the path of destruction, (either they don't know it, or they don't care) they've convinced themselves "*it's not that bad, it's not really hurting anyone, there's a lot worse stuff I could be doing*" and so they're pretty content to NOT change, maybe a minor little tweak (here or there) but NOT real change.

Q) Do you even want that sin out of your life?

Q) Do you even want walk with the Lord in paths of righteousness?

So I spend a decent amount of time doing **Biblical Counseling**, it's NOT uncommon for someone to sit down in my office w/ a problem, saying "*I want to change, but I don't know how?*" and I'm very aware (in those moments) I don't have the wisdom to help them, but I know who to point them to, so we open the Bible, and God speaks. And there are some passages that (for counselors) are especially helpful (Eph 4:17-24) is one of those.

(Personally) I've never used this passage in counseling, I've never preached this passage or really studied it in-depth until this week. But I've read numerous times and knew there is some richness to this passage in what it says about growing in holiness. But honestly, here's what I was expecting, I was expecting for it to have...

- 4 or 5 Steps for Holiness
- 4 ways to Live Holy
- (maybe) 3 or 4 Biblical Principles for Holy Living. ---

But what I ended up finding is that there is just –**One**. (One truth, One step. One solution to all our problems. One source for ALL change.) ---Just one. And I didn't see this quickly, I'm ashamed to say, I spent a lot of time this week, just trying to figure it out... I'm just wanting to break it into steps

Here's I'm thinking about... **the complexity of the problems we're facing in this room,**

- Some of you are lonely/ stress/ bored ...and so you've begun to self-medicate & cope by going to the refrigerator (numb it with **food**) or going to the computer (numb it w/ **porn**).
- Some of you don't know how to stop your outbursts of anger, (feelings of worry & anxiety overtake you)

The longer I try to deal with my own sins, and the longer I try to help others, the more I realize, **sin is a complex mess**, the human heart is impossible to completely understand. All these (thoughts/ feelings/ behaviors) are anything but simplistic, so I'm thinking "Surely Paul won't give us (in this passage) some one-size fits all approach to thousands of complicated problems, b/c every person is different, every problem is different, surely he's going to give us a wise sophisticated process to work our complicated problems through" --(so I was really shocked when I finally realized --there's NOT a 4-step process being taught here, there's one-step process being taught ---**Christ**. (One truth, one step, one solution) **Ex:** I'm sitting there writing out this 4-fold process for holiness, chopping this passage up, breaking it down into 4 steps, and I threw Jesus in there as my 2nd point... (that's convicting, as a preacher, making Jesus be one of your 4 points. It's a good thing I didn't preach that original sermon making Jesus some side point.)

- Jesus isn't a step in the process of holiness, he is the process.
- Jesus is the answer to ALL (substance abuse problems, sexual addictions, deep-rooted heart sins) (NOT Jesus plus all this other stuff ---Jesus)
- Don't get cynical, this is way more profound than we probably realize.
- Don't think, "Are you serious? 5yr old Sunday school answer, seriously?" Don't write Paul off, as if he's NOT understanding how complex our problems are. This answer is far more profound than we realize.

So let me show you what I mean... notice this first, (v.17-24) is one unit of thought. It's one continuous flow of thought, that's clear, right? There are 3 sentences in the English, but not 3 or 4 parts, it's one unified whole.

Now you need to **see** this, (it's not enough for me to tell you this is how it works) you need to see it for yourself.

- You must get your eyes on the page
- You won't really grow in holiness just taking advice from other people

B/c... this is too important to just trust an opinion of a man whose repeating the opinion of man, I could be wrong, I'm just trying to look at the text. ---**(v.19-22)** "They (unbelievers) have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 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"

Q) Did you see that? "the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self" (There's NO period. It's a comma, it's the same flow of thought)

- He's NOT saying, "You must learn Christ, the truth is in Him." ---done, end of sentence, new idea, now Jesus is back there, let's move forward to this thing called "putting off" & "putting on" ----NO!
- He's saying, "Learning Christ is how you put off & put on!"

(Putting off and putting on is short hand for repentance & faith ---)(To put off is to repentance, to put on is faith)

- He's saying, "Repentance & Faith aren't over here outside of Christ, they're in Christ, they're part of the truth that is in Jesus." ----Which means... **if you want to grow in holiness...**
- Don't set your eyes on your repentance
- Don't set your eyes your faith

Set your eyes on Jesus ---"learn Jesus" ... (and repentance & faith will flow out of that)

- Christianity isn't a set of truths & principles to live by
- Christianity is learning a Person

(Matt 11:29) "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, (What is a yoke?) in that day a yoke was often a heavy burden or heavy weight they would put across the neck of an animal to carry, Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus is saying, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light, and carrying this yoke, learning from me, you will find rest for your souls." In the verse right before this, "Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me -----So Jesus parallels (learning from Him --&-- coming to Him)

- If you come to Him, then you learn Him
- If you learn Him, then you come to Him

To **Learn** Jesus... is to **come to** Jesus. --- (And yes, there's a massive difference between learning about Jesus and learning Jesus.) --- Paul says "Learned Christ" many people only learn about him, but they never learn Him.

Q) Why? --- B/c they have NEVER come to Christ. ---- (Jesus says) "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.*" --but they don't come to Him.

There's a lot of people in church today, who say, "*Oh yeah, I know that verse, I learned that one a long time ago*" "*yeah I taught that back when... that's a good verse!*" --they've learned about Christ... they know the verses they're familiar with the truths, but they've never **learned Christ**, they've never come to Christ. --- And so they've never been saved, ---- (in all their Christianity, they've never actually become a Christian)

That's what he's saying... He describes a non-Christian and says (v.20) "*This is not how you learned Christ – assuming that you have heard about him & were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus*" (that's a weird way to say it)

- Q) Why doesn't he say, "*assuming you heard about him and were taught about him, the truth about Jesus*",
- Q) Why does he say "*assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, and the truth is in Jesus.*"
 - It doesn't say, "*Truth that is from Him*"
 - It says, "*the truth that is in Jesus*"

Listen... everything we do as Christians is "in Christ"

(Col 2) "Walk in Christ, we labor in Christ, we live in Christ, we obey in Christ, we die in Christ, we conquer in Christ!"

For Christians "in Christ" --- all truth we learn about Christ is truth in Christ, which means... **all our knowledge of Christ is personal & intimate**. --- (As Christians) everything we learn about Christ is **relational**.

And we all know there are those who have (as we call it) "Head-knowledge" and they know all this information but it never changes they're lives, we all know those people exist, and they're NOT Christians! --- A true Christian can't just have "Head-Knowledge of Jesus" --that's NOT possible.

- (For Christians) **all our knowledge of Christ ...leads to holy living**
- (For Christians) **all our knowledge of Christ ...is personal & intimate**
- (For Christians) There's NO knowledge of Christ that's just facts & information... all our knowledge of Him brings us into fellowship with the actual person of Christ. --Do you realize that?

Ex: I was at UWF, the other day, and I see the **JW**, and so I walked by them not trying to talk, thinking "*Stay focused Jon Mark, don't get distracted, you're here to find a quiet place to read*" and they text me, I get in the Library and look at my phone and they're like "*We just saw you walk by*" and so I knew, "*I got to go talk to them*" -- And at one point in our conversation, the older man I'm speaking to says, "*It's good that your seeking truth*" I said, "*I'm not seeking truth, I've found The Truth, I'm trying to help you find it.*" --- He got mad, b/c everyone applauds the person who is seeking truth, "*Oh, your seeking truth, that's great! Good for you*" --but they want to stone you when you claim to have found it. But all Christians have found **The Truth**, we've stopped searching...

- Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, the life*" --and we believe him.
- Our passage says, "*The truth is in Jesus*"
- Jesus said, "*You will know the truth and the truth will set you free!*"

Our passage is putting all this together saying... to the degree in which we have "*learned Christ, know the truth that is in Jesus*" --the natural overflowing is "putting off" and "putting on" --holiness.

(As a Church) We gather to "*Learn Christ*" every truth you learn (in this church) should be "*learning Christ, and the truth that's in Him*" (songs, supper, prayers, sermon, ministry is building us up into the fullness of Christ.)

Christians are to be continually "*growing in the grace & knowledge of Christ*" --- When you are growing in the grace & knowledge of Christ... than obeying him, (putting off the old self, putting on the new self) is near **effortless**. --- (Yes, there's a time to striving in the Christian life, holiness takes work, but it's striving **in Christ**, it's

working *in* Christ!) ---I can say (from personal experience, and many of you know this is true) I need Jesus' commands, I need his promises, I need his warnings, (at times) I need his discipline, but (in my best moments) **Jesus himself is enough**. Jesus is all the motivation I need. -(To know His nearness & fellowship that no sin in this world can compete with.) As I grow as a Christian, I find more and more, Jesus is enough to motive me to holiness, honoring him, pleasing Him, being able to maintain close fellowship with Him. ---He's enough.

Ex: Josiah was telling me (this week) about a book he's reading by Andrew Murray, where he said at one point, (I don't remember the exact quote) "*the promises of God are comforting & freeing, but the closer I walk with Jesus, the more I learn Jesus, the more he finds that even his commands are comforting & freeing.*"

Q) Have you learned Christ? (*Who he is & What he's done*) ...then come to Him in light of that knowledge? You will find that... every time you come to Him, you will receive grace. (His yoke really is easy, and his burden really is light, and coming to him, you really do find rest for your soul.)

When you hit that low point ...find Him as "*your refuge and strength your ever present help in time of need*". He created & sustains the universe, do you think he can't help you with whatever you're struggling with?

- This is more than... taking someone else's word for it
- This is more than... believing these things are true, ----this is **coming to Him**...believing he is this way That's what it means to "Learn Christ". -If there's one thing I learn every week, I learn He's good, (merciful, patient, loving) ----**what a friend we have in Jesus. O' to take Him at His Word.**

Ex: ---Cody & I were talking about this the other day, (I'll talk about Cody b/c he's not here today he's preaching at Redeemer Church) but he told me this week, he's been changed (more than anything else in his life) as he's been continually reading the Bible every day, and simply believing God is who he has revealed himself to be, and going to God as he reveals himself to be. ----That's what it means to learn Christ!!!

- **He reveals himself** to us (in scripture)
- **We believe** He is who he's revealed Himself to be and go to Him as if he's that way.

This is what it means to have "*a personal relationship with Jesus*" ---I hate that phrase "*personal relationship with Jesus*" I cringe even saying it, b/c so many unconverted professing Christians have hi-jacked it and dragged through the mud, saying "*a personal relationship with Jesus*" (as they continue to live in unrepentant sin, as they continue to carelessly about obeying the Lord, but '*by God they have a personal relationship with Jesus!*' ---You have a personal relationship with Jesus... **if**...

- 1.) You believe He is who he has revealed himself to be
- 2.) You go to Him in the way He's revealed himself to be sought after, ----(humble broken, repentant)

It's really tragic that so many people have a personal relationship with a Jesus they've created and will be very surprised (on Judgment Day) when The Real Jesus says to them "*Depart from me, I never knew you*" ---That's the whole point of him saying "*learned Jesus*" ...we don't just learn a Jesus we create on our own...

- Mormons & JW learn a Jesus
- Muslims learn a Jesus
- Many people learn a Jesus

But we "*Learn Jesus*" (as he's revealed himself to be in scripture).

- According to this passage: "*The truth that is in Jesus is to put off sin*"
- According to this passage, you can't have **Jesus & your old life of sin**. -(They don't together)
- It says, "*To know Jesus is to be a person who puts off the old self, and puts on the new self*" which (v.24) says is "*Created us in the image of God in true righteousness & holiness*"

(In other words) ----To **know Jesus** is to have been "*supernaturally re-created in true righteousness & holiness!*"

Ex: I hate when I hear Christians tell a non-Christian, "*I'm just like you*" that's NOT true, we're NOTHING the same. If you're just like them, you aren't a Christian. We are in every way completely different than them. (Yes, we still sin at times, no we aren't perfect), but a Christian saying, "*I'm just like you*" isn't true. (v.23-24) says, those who have learned Jesus "*put of the old self which belongs to their former manner of life and is corrupt*

through deceitful desires and (they are) “renewed in the spirit of their minds to put on the new self which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness & holiness.”

Look guys, whatever “**learning Christ**” means... clearly it has to do with **the mind**.

- (v.17) “They (Non-Christians are living in) “*the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them*”
- (v.20) Christians are those who have “*Learned Christ, and the truth that’s in Him, are renewing the minds*”

But it’s more than that... “*putting off the old self*” is **repentance**. ---And the (Heb & Greek) words for Repentance both have to do with ‘*the changing of our mind*’. So repentance is taking off our old mind & putting on the new mind.”

You only sin b/c you think wrong thoughts. If you never thought wrong thoughts, and never believed lies, you’d never sin, we sin when we think wrongly. “*Behind every **sinful action** is a process of **sinful thinking**.*” (2x)---I will only sin when I am **deceived** –(in my thinking).

- If I’m believing truth...I won’t sin
- If I’m believing lies ...I will always sin

And (in case you forgot)...

- The **world** lies to you
- **Satan** lies to you
- Your **Sinful flesh** lies to you

Christians minds have been **saved**, but they must be continually **renewed**

- (Col 3:10) “(our minds) *are being renewed in knowledge after the image of our Creator.*” ---Through knowledge God is renewing & restoring our minds back to the way they were originally created to be.
- (2 Pet 1:3) “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him*”
- (1 Cor 14:20) “*Do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature*”
- (Prov 18:15) “*An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.*” “*The discerning heart seeks knowledge... The wise lay up knowledge, Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.*” (Prov 2) “*raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver ...then you will... find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*” ---50 more commands to seek knowledge in (Prov)!!!
- Our culture isn’t only trying to get us to think wrong
- Our culture is trying to get us to NOT thinking at all

We know... America hasn’t always been **Anti-intellectual**, but over the last 80-100yrs (especially the last 50-60) there has been a progressive change.

- **R. C. Sproul** has written that “*we live in what may be the most anti-intellectual period in the history of Western civilization.*”
- **John Stott** argues that anti-intellectualism is a form of worldliness... b/c its out to destroy the mind which is the foundation for knowing Biblical truth.
- The greatest commandment “*Love The Lord your God w/ all your heart, soul & **mind***” (Matt 22:37)
- Paul’s constant prayer (for the church) is that they’d be “*increasing in the knowledge of God, that they’re love would abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment*” (Phil 1:9)
- We are told repeatedly to “*Set your minds on things above, not things on the earth...let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*” (Col 3)
- And in (Phil 3) “*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely... think about (3x) these things.*”
- Paul said, “*I count everything as loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*”
- Here’s the only thing you’re allowed to boast in “*that you understand and know Me, says the Lord*”
- **Rom 12** (we spent 6wks on this) “*if you want to be transformed (live like Jesus) it will happen by renewing your **mind***”

I know what happens when you hear a sermon on **Holiness**, you think “*ok, here comes the list of all the things that I’m not doing, and I need to start doing to be holy.*” ---So I’m very excited to tell you, holiness isn’t about

learning lists, it's about learning a person. ---And if you've ever been at a **really low point** (where you just feel stuck and like growth & change seems impossible) for someone to give you a list of things to do comes like a 10,000lb weight on your shoulders and drives you down even deeper into hopelessness. ---But to get the counsel, "know a Person, learn a person, and he will change you."

The Psalmist David (hit some really low points) —what did he say in those moments? (Ps 62:5-7) "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God."

—Listen, I can tell you this...

- You find me someone who... is **good at rule keeping & morality** ...and see how holy they are.
- You find me someone who... **knows Christ** (I mean... really knows Him!)

(And without question) 100% of the time, that person who knows Jesus is living a more holy person, than the person just trying hard to keep a list of rules and moral guidelines. --- (And I'm NOT downplaying morality) I'm just saying, it doesn't come through more effort and trying harder, like it does by learning Christ. —

- Spend your life knowing... **who He is**
- Spend your life knowing... **what He's done**
- Spend your life waiting for... **what He's coming to do**

And holiness will come (naturally). ---I can prove that to you... think about those time's where you were living most holy, we're they not the times that you were walking closest with Jesus, spending most time with Him?

Here's the theological category we've been talking about. (1 Cor 1:30) "You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us... sanctification & redemption." Jesus isn't just your redemption, he's your sanctification. You need him (at the beginning & the end & the whole way through). —This should be the most common teaching in Christianity, The Sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

- The sufficiency of Christ in **His Saving Work** —(He says) "It is finished"
- The sufficiency of Christ in **His Sanctifying Work** —(it says) "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ."

Ex: Friday, I was talking to a good friend (whose a pastor at a like-minded church in this city) talking about the mission of the church, "We aren't ministering to our city as we should, b/c we aren't ministering to each-other as we should" I said, "I agree brother, but we aren't doing what we should be doing for our city, b/c we aren't doing what we should be doing for the church, and we aren't doing what we should be doing for the church, because as preachers we're NOT putting people's eyes on the pages and telling them 'See Christ! He's infinitely valuable!'" —And I said, "It just can't be us (as Pastors) saying tell everyone 'Jesus is enough!'" I said, "our job is to put their eyes on the page and make sure everyone sees this (in the Word) and then goes to Jesus and finds experientially —it's true! He is enough! He is better than sin! In his presence is fullness of joy! At his right hand is pleasure forevermore." ---B/c listen, (when that's happening) ---you can't be stopped from pursuing holiness.

Conclusion:

- Maybe some of your thinking it's too simplistic, in the Bible does say that when we preach Christ that people will call it foolish.
- Maybe there's others they think it's too profound & vague, and I would just say to you, "this is the beginning point of Christianity, this is step one, step 2/3/4/5/6, it's the whole Christian life."
- There's a sense in which, I can't say anything more simplistic than this
- There's a sense in which, I can't say anything more profound than this

So.. (if your baby Christian or if you're the most mature Christian in this room) the process & solution is the same.

- We don't move **past Christ** into other things
- We just go **deeper into** "the truth that is in Him"

So whatever sin your struggling with... the answer is —**Jesus**

- Maybe you just want to devote yourself to seeking God & obeying, what is the answer? –**Jesus**
- Maybe you are struggling with lust sexual immorality, some other sin, what is the answer? –**Jesus**
- Maybe you just want to walk in holiness... the answer is –**Jesus**

“*Learn Him*” don’t move away from Him, don’t think some accountability partners is your solution, or being with the right person, or changing your circumstances, or fixing whatever thing outside of you.

(Heb 12:1-2) “*Let us lay aside every weight sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is before us, **looking to Jesus.***”

- How do you... run the race? –Looking to Jesus
- How do you... persevere to the end? –Looking to Jesus
- How do you... lay aside every **sin** that clings so closely? –Looking to Jesus