

STUDY 20

As You Received Christ Jesus the Lord . . .

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WHERE ARE WE?

‘This closing session is intended to have people move out as the baptised community, with the issues accompanying baptism setting the direction.’¹ ‘Ah’, we think, ‘at last! Here comes the application. Now we will be told what to do. Now all the “theory” (or “theology”) of the school is to be put into “practice”. This is where the rubber hits the road!’

We like being told what to do—so we can do it, or decide not to do it, according to our own decisions and preferences. In the New Testament there is plenty that tells us what to do. We like hearing it, and we like to think that whether we do it or not is up to us. The sad thing is that lifestyle surveys in the western world show up little difference between the ways Christians and non-Christians live their lives in areas such as consumerism, moral probity, and relationship breakdown:

For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like (James 1:23).²

So quickly can pass the memory of what is written and said in a school such as this, with as little effect.

Interestingly, however, James does not say we forget what we heard; he says we forget what we looked like. And he says that we find out what we are really like when we ‘look into the perfect law, the law of liberty’. For James, this is ‘the royal law’ (James 2:8) of ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ whom he serves (James 1:1), the gospel, ‘the implanted word that has the power to save your souls’, which we are to ‘welcome with meekness’, which replaces ‘all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness’ (James 1:21). It is as we look into that word that we see who and what we are, that is

¹ Ian Pennicook, 2009 Ministry School speakers’ notes.

² Unless otherwise stated, all scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

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not to be forgotten.³ It is those who do this who ‘will be blessed in their doing’ (James 1:25). This we will seek to do in this session.

I AM BAPTISED!

Perhaps a story can help set the scene. A Christian man was invited by friends into an R-rated ‘adult’ cinema to watch a ‘blue’ (pornographic) movie. ‘I can’t go in there’, he replied, ‘I’m baptised!’

What is the significance of his reply? Is he now too ‘pure’ to indulge in such ‘defilement’? Is that now ‘taboo’ for him, out of fear? Is he trying to give a ‘good witness’ to his friends? Or is it just that what is in there no longer fits with who he is, and perhaps even that any interest or desire he might have had for it has been taken away? And replaced with a measure of abhorrence toward such things?

Paul the apostle says:

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27).

The Greek is literally: ‘have put on Christ’—like a garment. So now we are walking around in Christ. In fact, this is what Paul says we are now to do:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives [Greek: *to walk*] in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Col. 2:6–7).

For the Christian man to go in and watch a pornographic movie, then, would be equivalent to what Paul says to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ’s body? Should I therefore take the parts of Christ’s body and make them parts of a prostitute’s body? Never! (1 Cor. 6:15; *my translation*).⁴

This is because ‘anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him’ (1 Cor. 6:17). Elsewhere Paul is so bold as to say, ‘we have the mind of Christ’ (1 Cor. 2:16)—we think the way he does. Being in this position, with the mind of the one who has been kept to give himself entirely to his purified Bride (see Eph. 5:25–27), is incompatible with giving yourself to watch a pornographic movie that features adultery and fornication.

Not only does walking around in Christ cause us to avoid engaging in what is evil; it also propels us into doing what is right and good. With regard to having ‘the mind of Christ’, Paul says to the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5).

³ See C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle of James* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1966), pp. 66–74 for the positions of various scholars on these verses. Some scholars say that the law of liberty reminds us of how far short we have fallen. We take it here that it tells us who we are in Christ as forgiven sinners and children of the heavenly Father.

⁴ See study 6: ‘Baptism as Incorporation into the Body of Christ’.

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An alternative translation is: ‘Let the same mind be in you that *you have* in Christ Jesus’.⁵ This has to do with looking to the interests of others rather than our own interests, in humility regarding others as better than ourselves, and doing nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. This is the mind of Christ that *we have* in him.

DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD

While we draw upon Romans 6 to understand what baptism is, Paul is not giving there an instruction on baptism. He is rather giving an exhortation on how we are not to sin, now that the grace of God has come to us in Christ:

How can we who died to sin go on living in it?

The death he died, he died to sin, once for all.

. . . we have been united with him in a death like his.

. . . consider yourselves dead to sin.

. . . do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness.

. . . sin will have no dominion over you . . .

. . . set free from sin (Rom. 6:2, 10, 5, 11, 12–13, 14, 18).

Baptism is mentioned in passing; it is assumed that those in Rome already understood that baptism is our identification with Jesus Christ in his death, burial and rising to life again.⁶ And that it is with a view to the resurrection-life of righteousness that is to come (in the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells—see 2 Pet. 3:13), that we can live in by faith even now:

. . . we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

. . . if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

. . . the life he lives, he lives to God.

. . . consider yourselves . . . alive to God in Christ Jesus.

. . . present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.

. . . you . . . have become slaves of righteousness.

. . . present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification (Rom. 6:4, 8, 10, 11, 13, 18, 19).

⁵ NRSV footnote.

⁶ See Martin Bleby, *The Gift of God: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as Sacraments of the Cross* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2007), pp. 41–42.

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All of this is to be done on the basis of what has happened on the cross:

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:6).

We can be pleased that this ‘body of sin’, called also ‘this body of death’ (Rom. 7:24)—this body in which we have sinned, that is rightly subject to the sentence of death—has been destroyed. No way would we want to take that defiled carcass into the holy presence of God! This destruction happened on the cross where ‘our old self was crucified with him’. Literally it is ‘our old *man*’ (ἄνθρωπος, *anthrōpos*), signifying Adam. The whole corrupted corpse of Adamic humanity—us included—was destroyed there on that cross. Thank God for that! Especially since ‘whoever has died is freed from sin’ (Rom. 6:7). ‘There is . . . now no condemnation’ (Rom. 8:1)—the sentence has been fully executed.

The language of the old Adam is picked up again in the letter to the Colossians:

. . . you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves⁷ with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator (Col. 3:9–10).

The ‘old self’ here is again literally the ‘old *man*’—Adam—and the ‘new self’ is literally the ‘new *man*’, here signifying Christ. Note that all this is the reason given for why we should ‘not lie to one another’. We might expect that the reason we should not lie to one another is because lying is wrong, and can be socially harmful. But the reason given here is that we have been given a whole new change of person, with whom lying—making anything out to be other than the way it is—is utterly inconsistent and pointless.

This change of person lies also at the heart of the instructions for living in the letter to the Ephesians:

Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self [literally *man* = Adam], corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self [literally *man* = Christ], created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors . . . (Eph. 4:17–25).

All the other instructions for living flow from this.

Towards the end of the letter to the Romans, Paul insists on making the same transfer, in the context of his instructions as to how to live:

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling

⁷ ἐνδυσάμενοι, *endusamenoī*: middle voice (see study 9, ‘Baptism as Purification from Sin’); literally: ‘you got yourselves clothed’.

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and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Rom. 13:11–14).

If we have got ourselves clothed with Christ, then let us be sure we are wearing him!

CHRIST WHO IS YOUR LIFE

How is seeing and knowing ourselves to be walking around in Christ different from reading the instructions in the New Testament and applying them to our lives? The first thing we need to say is that there may be no difference—those who give an application of the preached word may be doing so as those who are walking around in Christ, and those who receive the application may be the same. It all depends on what position we are in. We have said earlier⁸ that in our unredeemed sinful condition we have a preferred sense of having our own independent patch of ground on which we stand, over against God and other persons, from which we seek to operate on our own terms. This is dispensed with when we come to Christ. There dawns a realisation that nothing is of ourselves—all is of Christ! All is from God:

No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven (John 3:27).

That is a very absolute statement—no one (whatsoever) can receive anything (at all) except what has been given (freely, without price) from heaven (from God alone)—and it is true. Apart from Christ we hold out against it:

And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God (John 3:19–21).

What does it mean to have our deeds ‘done [or ‘wrought’, RSV] in God’? It is something that we will only ever know when we have been in the reality and flow of it:

I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Cor. 15:10).

We can say that in a pious way, while still occupying our supposedly independent patch of ground. But those who have been brought humbly and thankfully to a faith-relationship with Christ will know its reality in practice. Such will be glad that the glory for what they do goes to God and not to themselves:

. . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

They are indeed our good works, but the One who does the work gets the glory.

It would have been inconceivable for Jesus to think of himself in any way independent or apart from, let alone over against, his Father:

⁸ See study 6, p. 6.

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Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves (John 14:10–11)

This is tantamount to saying: Even if you do not believe that I have this special relationship with the Father, at least see what the Father Himself is doing, and believe on that account!

Jesus prayed that, as a result of his suffering and death and resurrection, our relationship with the Father and with him would be no different from this:

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us . . . I in them and you in me (John 17:21, 23).

It should be no less inconceivable for us that we could be or do anything apart from God.

No one in this position will hear the good news of grace as that which just relieves us of the guilt of our sins, and so leaves us free just to get on with life as it suits us. No one who is one with Christ in this way will hear the commandments and instructions for life as legal obligations, but as welcome admonitions that make absolute sense. But for any who are not in this position, who are still trying to make out that they occupy their own independent patch of ground, both gospel and its application in life, however soundly they are proclaimed, will be misheard to suit the hearer.

GROW IN THE GRACE

We hear again from Paul:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Col. 2:6–7).

Elsewhere he sets this instruction within a prayerful paean of declaration and praise:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Eph. 3:14–21).

I do not think we could ever pray a better prayer for our people than that. Especially for newer Christians, but also for all of us—for who could ever come to the end of that?

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Peter similarly exhorts us:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Pet. 3:18).

Now we are in ‘the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’, how are we to grow in it in ways that bring glory to Christ? This brings us to the whole ‘mystery of godliness’ (1 Tim 3:16, NIV). ‘Godliness’ here is εὐσεβεία, *eusebeia*, which is not just the moral uprightness sometimes associated with ‘godliness’, but signifies reverential feelings, the exercise of piety and devotion, and the practice of religion—what is loosely termed ‘spirituality’.⁹ This would take another whole study, or perhaps a series of helpful workshops. To conclude this study, I will simply dip into John Kleinig’s recently published book *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* that draws on the deep and authentic Lutheran tradition of gospel piety.

Kleinig has much to say about our place in Christ, the nature of Christian meditation (which is nothing other than hearing the Word of God),¹⁰ the practice of prayer in Christ¹¹ (it may be a new thought for some of us that when Paul the apostle said he prayed for people ‘night and day’ in 1 Thess. 3:10 and 2 Tim. 1:3, he meant in his regular evening and morning prayers),¹² spiritual warfare and practical holiness, all in a practice of devotion that is regular, homely, and achievable, that includes the liturgy of Divine Service and the Holy Communion, the liturgical seasons of the year, the songs of the church, and praying the Psalms—all of which does and should occupy a good proportion of the energies of Christians and their leaders. But we may find most helpful Kleinig’s outline of the process by which life in the Spirit unfolds, derived from Luther in his meditation on Psalm 119. He contrasts it with the monastic tradition of spiritual formation that Luther had experienced as a monk:

That tradition followed a well-trying, ancient pattern of reading, meditation, and prayer. Its goal was ‘contemplation,’ the experience of ecstasy, bliss, rapture, and illumination through union with the glorified Lord Jesus. To reach this goal, a monk ascended in three stages, as on a ladder, from earth to heaven. The ascent began by reading a passage from the Scriptures aloud to quicken the mind and arouse devotion; it proceeded to heartfelt praying and meditating on heavenly things; it ended in waiting for the experience of contemplation, the infusion of heavenly gifts, and the bestowal of spiritual illumination.

In contrast to this, Luther proposed an evangelical pattern of spirituality as reception rather than self-promotion. This involves three things: prayer, meditation, and temptation.

The German word he used for ‘temptation’ was *Anfechtung*—‘attack’ from the evil one:

These three terms describe the life of faith as a cycle that begins with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit, concentrates on the reception of the Holy Spirit through meditation on God’s Word, and

⁹ There is in fact no such thing as ‘spirituality’ in the New Testament. There is only the Holy Spirit, and what the Holy Spirit does in people, and the word ‘spiritual’ only ever means that which pertains to the Holy Spirit and his work in us. Martin Luther: “‘Spiritual’ is nothing else than what is done in us and by us through the Spirit and faith” (*Luther’s Works*, American Edition, Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1961, vol. 37, p. 92, quoted in John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today*, Concordia, St Louis, 2008, p. 24.)

¹⁰ See also Martin Bleby, ‘Meditating on the Law’ in *Sharper Than a Two-edged Sword*, Ministry School 2002, NCPI, Blackwood, 2002, pp. 41–6.

¹¹ See also Martin Bleby, *God and Prayer: Our Participation in God’s Great Enterprise* (NCPI, Blackwood, 2005); Geoffrey C. Bingham, *Come Let Us Pray* (NCPI, Blackwood, 1988).

¹² Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, p. 76.

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results in spiritual attack. This, in turn, leads a person back to further prayer and intensified meditation. Luther, therefore, does not envisage the spiritual life as a process of self-development, but as a process of reception from the triune God. This process of reception turns proud, self-sufficient individuals into humble beggars before God.¹³

Coming from a more catholic style of Anglican tradition, I have been exposed to that monastic contemplative model, and have tried to make a go of it. But I like the robustness of this scheme of Luther's—it seems to me much more down to earth and true to life. Especially the part about spiritual attack:

As long as we operate by our own power, with our own intellect and our own too-human notions, the devil lets us be. But as soon as we meditate on God's Spirit-filled Word and draw on the power of the Holy Spirit by meditating on it, the devil attacks us by stirring up misunderstanding, contradiction, opposition, and persecution. He mounts that attack through the enemies of the Gospel in the Church and in the world. The purpose of this attack is to destroy our faith and undo the hidden work of God's Word in us. As soon as God's Word is planted in our hearts, the devil tries to drive it out so that we will no longer operate by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, paradoxically, these attacks are counter-productive. Luther says, 'For as soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor [of theology] of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God's Word' . . . Through the attacks of the evil one we are drawn further out of ourselves and deeper into Christ.¹⁴

So we pray as suppliants before the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit, so we can meditate on God's word, and when we do that and all that goes with it, we get clobbered, and that drives us to ask even more for the gift of the Holy Spirit, so we can meditate even more on God's word, so that we can find out what it's really all about and what is really going on in life, and as soon as we do that we get clobbered again, and so it goes on. This may be true to our experience. We do not go looking for these attacks, but they come. 'Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you' (1 Pet. 4:12). They are essential to our wellbeing in Christ. That is how we grow and mature in God.

¹³ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, pp. 15–16.

¹⁴ Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace*, p. 22.