



What does it mean to 'Learn Christ'?

An Orientation to the Second Strategy

The second strategy of our Diocesan Vision and Strategy is "Learn Christ in order to become more like Christ". Through learning Christ and becoming more like Christ we can fulfil the vision to Love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and love our neighbours as ourselves.

But what does it mean to 'Learn Christ'? The phrase appears in Ephesians 4 v 20 in various translations of the Bible: eg

But that is not the way you learned Christ! (NRSV)

But you have not so learned Christ, (NKJV)

But you did not learn Christ in this way (NASB)

Some other translations refer to learning 'about Christ' (NLT) or 'knowing' Christ (NIV). However, the most literal translation is 'learn Christ'. This phrase – to learn a person - is used uniquely by Paul in this letter and so to understand what Paul meant by 'to learn Christ' we need to look at the context of the verse and rest of the letter to the Ephesians.

The immediate context lies in Ephesians Chapter 4 v 17-24 (NRSV)

*" 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, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness".*

Here, Paul is talking about 'putting off' the 'old person' (the corrupt, deceitful former life, sensuality and covetousness) and the 'putting on' of the 'new person' with a renewed mind and clothed in God's holiness and righteousness. It's a whole new way of life for those who have 'learned Christ'.

So how did the Ephesians learn Christ? Ephesians 4 v 21 tells us that the Ephesians "**heard about** Christ **and** were **taught in him**, as truth is in Jesus". The Ephesians first heard about Christ through the apostle Paul. Paul spent two years in Ephesus, speaking 'boldly and arguing persuasively' about the Kingdom of God. Those who came to faith were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul and many were healed of sickness and demonic oppression. (Acts 19)

The first step for all of us is to learn *about* Christ through listening to the teaching of wise Christian leaders, reading the Bible and discussing what we are learning and hearing with others. The next step is to be 'taught *in* him'. This refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we commit our lives to Christ we allow Christ himself to be our teacher, to direct our steps, to renew our thinking and living, so that gradually, day by day, we grow in

Christ-likeness. Why do we need this? Because without the Holy Spirit we cannot throw off our 'old' nature or our 'old way of thinking. We are so easily deceived and can so readily fall back into a lifestyle that alienates us from God.

One of the first things the Ephesians learned from Christ, according to Paul, is peace and reconciliation with God the Father.

“He [Christ] came and preached peace to you . . . for through him we have access to the Father by one Spirit . . . you are no longer foreigners but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household . . . (Ephesians 2 v 17-19)

So to Learn Christ means first and foremost to come through Christ into relationship with God the Father, the Holy Spirit and our fellow Christians.

Paul was also eager for the Ephesians to learn about God’s love for them and experience it through Christ. He prays that

“Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith and that [they] being rooted and established in love may have power to grasp . . . how wide and high and long and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God”

This too, is a foundational step in our own relationship with God – to know the full measure of God’s love for us. Not just knowing about God’s love but actually experiencing it for ourselves through Christ dwelling in our hearts. Only then are we able to become

“imitators of God . . . as dearly loved Children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. . .” (Ephesians 5 v 1-2)

So, in summary, what does it mean to ‘Learn Christ’?

1. **To learn about Christ** through listening to the teaching of wise Christian leaders, reading the Bible and discussing what we are learning and hearing with others.
2. **To be taught in Christ**, as Christ dwells in us through the Holy Spirit.
3. **To be at peace and confident in our relationship with God** and the Holy Spirit, through Christ.
4. **To experience the height, depth and breadth of God’s love for us.**
5. **To put off the old way of thinking and behaving and put on Christ’s righteousness and a renewed mind.**
6. **To become more Christlike**, living a life of love

How can we ‘Learn Christ’?

As you can see, “Learning Christ’ is a process, although not necessarily a linear one. Most of us learn about Christ from others (step 1) before we have our own personal relationship with him (step 2), but some have an encounter with Jesus first – for example the Apostle Paul himself. (Acts 9). In fact, most of us are learning each of steps 1-6 listed above continually. We are all at different starting points as we set out on this journey to ‘Learn Christ’ in the Diocese. Some of us are at the very beginning of the journey and asking ‘Who is this Jesus’? Others of us may be new to faith in Jesus and some have been

learning Christ for many years. Perhaps some of us are, or are becoming, one of the wise Christians who can teach others. Michael Frost, in his book 'Surprise the World' suggests that "we need to know [Christ], if we are going to share him as the reason for the hope we have." One thing is certain: none of us can say that we have learned all there is to learn; that we perfectly comprehend the height and depth of God's love or live a perfectly Christ-like life of love. In this regard, we are all life-long learners.

So where to start?

You might like to read steps 1-6 above again and consider how you would like to learn and grow some more. Are you hungry for more 'head' knowledge and information about Christ? Are you hungry for a deeper relationship with Jesus? Are you seeking more transformation in yourself – more 'putting off' and 'putting on'? A more renewed mind? A more Christ-like daily life? All of the above?! You may need to let these questions slosh around in your brain for a while and see what comes to the surface, or the answer might leap out at you. You may need to discuss this with your small group, or the leaders of your church or organisation to find a way forward together as well as for yourself. Ask Christ himself to show you.

What resources are available?

Some recommended resources are outlined in a separate brochure, called "Learn Christ". Links to some of them are available on the Diocesan website. Feel free to explore other resources that you find helpful and recommend them to us by emailing Bishop Ian via bishop@bunbury.org.au.

In the brochure the resources are described in a way that makes it as easy as possible to match the resource to the need. However, all the edges are 'blurred' and it is quite possible that a factual book about Jesus may lead to a deeper spiritual encounter with Christ and so on. Some resources suit particular learning styles – for example if you don't like reading you may prefer to listen to a talk than read a book. If one resource doesn't suit you, put it down and try another one. Jesus himself is our teacher and can lead us where he wants us to go in our learning.

As always, we would love to hear from you. Please let us know how you are going on this journey and how you are increasingly "Learning Christ" .

Bibliography

- "How do we learn Christ'? John Piper Lecture – Look at the Book: Ephesians Part 5 – Online
- "Surprise the World" Chapter 6 - by Michael Frost