

What We Learned in Christ

Bible Reading: Psalm 33; Romans 6:5-11

“[You were taught in Christ Jesus] to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” ([Eph. 4:23-24](#)).
- [Ephesians 4:23-24](#)

Believers are often exhorted to “let go and let God,” to be entirely passive in their sanctification (growth in holiness). The best intentions lie behind this advice. After all, we know that our works contribute nothing to our righteous standing before the Lord ([Gal. 2:15-16](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#)); thus, many people think that giving ourselves a role in sanctification comes perilously close to denying grace.

Certainly it is easy to confuse the process of sanctification with the once-for-all declaration of justification. Even Protestants might believe, implicitly, that our works secure our place in heaven or make God love us more than believers who are “further behind” in their sanctification. To avoid this problem, we simply need to maintain the biblical distinction

IRECT RETREAT 2017

between justification and sanctification. It is unnecessary to deny our role in sanctification altogether. God's justification of a person, the starting point of Christian living, relies solely on the work of Christ ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)). Sanctification, [Ephesians 4:23–24](#) explains, requires cooperation between the Lord and individual believers.

God's "job" is to renew our minds. Note the passive voice in verse 23: we are to "be renewed [by the Lord]." He performs the work of inward transformation, renewing our affection for Him and giving us an ever-deepening understanding of His ways. The Lord works through means to accomplish this — personal Bible study, the preached Word of God, the sacraments, prayer — but He performs the work of transformation. We are grateful for the Lord's work, for His power guarantees that we will fulfill our role and advance in holiness ([Phil. 2:12–13](#)).

Our job is to live out God's transforming work and "put on the new self," which means putting His ways into practice. In other words, it is to live in conformity to Christ. Gregory of Nyssa was one of the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers who helped codify the language of orthodox Trinitarianism. He comments on [Ephesians 4:24](#): "There is but one garment of salvation, namely, Christ. Hence the "new man" created in God's likeness is none other than Christ. One who has put on Christ has thus put on the new person created in God's likeness" (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. 8, p. 165; hereafter ACCNT).

IRECT RETREAT 2017

Coram Deo

Taking off our old selves — our Adamic natures that love rebellion — and putting on Christ is really a single act. We cannot live in Adam and in Christ at the same time, which means that we cannot refuse to give up our sin and profess to follow Jesus. We will not be perfect in this life, but we will, if we have faith in Christ, recognize the incongruity between life in Adam and life in Christ, and we will strive daily to live in conformity to Jesus.

Passages for Further Study

Psalm 33

[Romans 6:5–11](#)

[2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

[Hebrews 3:12–14](#)

Group Devotion (30 minutes)

1. Share one thing from your personal devotion this morning that changed the way you view how you would grow spiritually
2. Share one thing from this morning devotion (either personal or group) that has moved your heart and encouraged you to become or do something, if any

Prayer (15 minutes)

Close with prayer

Devotion materials were taken from Ligonier Ministries

Transformation into Glory

Bible Reading: Psalm 34; Colossians 1:21-29

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me”

- 1 Corinthians 13:11

There is growth in the Christian life. The final end of that growth comes when we are face to face with God and are transformed fully into glory. As Paul writes, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)).

One of the problems we continually encounter in the evangelical world is an attitude that says, “I don’t want to learn theology. I don’t need to study. I just want to preserve my childlike faith. I want to keep it simple.” This is not an expression of Christian maturity but reflects an orientation toward infantile pursuits. It expresses a false humility.

Childish behavior is totally appropriate for children. If, for instance, a small child has an imaginary friend, that does not concern us. If an adult

IRECT RETREAT 2017

has an imaginary friend, however, we should be very much concerned. Now, the Bible does indeed call us to be like children in one sense: We are to have a childlike spirit of trust and confidence in our heavenly Father. But there is a great difference between being childlike and being childish. Our Father desires for us to grow in our knowledge and obedience to Him. He wants us to mature.

It takes time for fruit to come to fullness. This is true in the realm of persons and of spiritual growth as well. Today it seems as if everyone wants to hurry through this process. We want “five easy lessons to be an effective Christian,” or “eight quick steps to spiritual victory.” This is simply not possible. Human beings are made in the image of God Himself, and are far too complex for such simplistic and mechanical programs.

For fruit to mature—and ultimately it is we ourselves who are the fruit of the Spirit—there has to be nurture. There is no substitute for the classical biblical way of Christian maturity. It is through gradual growth, nurtured in the context of active participation in the sacraments and community discipline of the church, through study of the Word, and by means of faithful prayer, obedience, and service that Christians mature.

Coram Deo

Each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit—that is, each aspect of you as you are transformed—is nurtured through personal relationships. Because Christian character does not develop in a void, take the initiative to become involved regularly in a small group fellowship.

IRECT RETREAT 2017

Passages for Further Study

[Philippians 1:3–6](#)

[Colossians 1:21–29](#)

[1 John 2:28–3:3](#)

Group Devotion (30 minutes)

1. Share one thing from your personal devotion this morning that changed the way you view how you would grow spiritually
2. Share one thing from this morning devotion (either personal or group) that has moved your heart and encouraged you to become or do something, if any

Prayer (15 minutes)

Close with prayer

Devotion materials were taken from Ligonier Ministries