

Renew!
Ephesians 4: 17-24

**First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**Dedication Sunday, Nov. 12, AD 2023
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A few weeks ago, I got to be part of an 80th birthday celebration for my beloved theology professor Douglas Kelly. Through the years, Dr. Kelly has been a mentor, a pastor and even a friend to me. He's a faithful intercessor and reminded me when I saw him that he still prays for our family 4 times a week. There were

many tributes offered from former students and colleagues. I was struck by how many knew Doug as a great ally during times of criticism or even church conflict. His son recalled the story of a young pastor coming to Dr. Kelly when his ministry was coming under fierce attack. Dr. Kelly had two questions for the young man. Everything turns on how you answer these. 1) What do I think of Jesus Christ? 2) What do I think of myself in Christ? In other words, first ask, "Who is Jesus? Who is Jesus to *me*?" Then ask, "So who am I now that I am joined to Jesus?" Answering these questions brings strength in the midst of weakness. Confidence in the midst of having your character and skill questioned. Love in the midst of wanting to take revenge. Peace in the midst of tumult. What do I think of Jesus Christ? What do I think of myself *in* Christ?¹

During these three months studying Ephesians, we've been answering those questions in different ways week by week. Let's just recall some of the things we've uncovered.



What do I think of Jesus Christ? According to Ephesians, I think of Jesus as both Savior and Lord. He has always existed as the eternal Son of God. But in the fullness of time, he came to us as a man. There he gave his life to redeem us. Jesus sacrificed his life's blood on the cross. But on the third day he was raised. He has been seated, installed, at the Father's right hand, exalted above every principality and power, even dominion and name. And Jesus will accomplish his ultimate plan. He will unite all things, things in heaven and things on earth in himself by the Spirit we share to the glory of God the Father. Jesus will make all things new. For he has destroyed the hostility between the Triune God

and humanity. He is the new man, the man for all men, women and children. He is God reconciling the world to himself. That's a *little* bit of what I think of Jesus.



What do I think of myself in Christ? According to Ephesians, we can start our list with ten affirmations. When we are in Jesus, we can claim these things about our identity. In Christ, I am

- 1) **An adopted child** of the Father because Jesus is my brother in the flesh.
- 2) **Filled with the Holy Spirit.** Christ's own Spirit now resides in my heart.
- 3) **Located in Christ.** He claimed me before the world was made, and now, I have heard the word of his salvation and believed. So,
- 4) **I am a believer.** No longer without God, or without hope in the world. I am his and he is mine. I am not alone but joined to Jesus.
- 5) **Freed from sin.** This means I have died to the old life of sin. I am freed from bondage.
- 6) **Raised with Jesus** from spiritual death into everlasting life. That eternal vigor begins now.
- 7) **Seated with Jesus.** For this very moment I am seated with Jesus in the heavenlies. He has taken me with him to the Father's right hand. I have access to the throne room of the Triune God every moment.
- 8) **Given Valuable Work.** And I have meaningful work to do. I have been re-created in Jesus for the very purpose of beautiful works. God has already prepared these. I get to walk about discovering the daily wonder of getting to adorn his glory.
- 9) **Part of the One New Man.** I am united to Jesus himself, and so I am joined as brother with everyone else joined to Jesus. That is, I belong to the church, to all believers throughout every place and time.
- 10) **A Builder of his Temple.** I have been granted specific grace to help build up Christ's body, to help construct his holy temple in the world through which multitudes can meet and be joined to Jesus.

This is what Paul means by declaring that I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. He is everything! And I am his. That's who I am in Christ. And that's just the tip of the treasure!

Do you feel your perspective change just hearing quickly some of the answers to these questions? Urgent business, pressing concerns, troubling decisions, tricky finances, hostilities of others, anxiety about the mess of the world—they all get powered down by naming afresh who Jesus is and who we are in him. We discover the peaceful truth of what Lady Julian of Norwich said 800 years ago, “And all shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

In our passage this morning, Paul writes a striking statement: “the truth is in Jesus.” I wanted us first to feel that truth as we considered Doug Kelly’s questions. That gives it more reality as we affirm that Jesus is the very center of reality. Everything begins in him. He is the ground on which all creation is built. All truth is coordinated with him. For Jesus himself *is* the *Truth*. He’s the *Goodness* we long to taste. He’s the *Beauty* we most desire.

The first half of Ephesians lays down these facts about Jesus. The second half works out what this truth that is Jesus means for our every day living. So Paul strongly reminds them not to slip back into the way they lived before they knew Jesus. “Don’t live any longer like the majority of ordinary people. Their minds are dark. They are alienated from the life of God. They are blind to the truth. And they have given themselves over to their desires, that they don’t even know are destructive to themselves and others.”

We see that all the time. A lot of us used to be like that. We saw everything in terms of dollar signs. We saw every person sexualized and evaluated for our consumption. We lied easily if it made the moment more convenient. We manipulated others for our benefit. We plotted continually for our diversion, advancement, entertainment, or thrills. We guarded our power fiercely, viewing others as enemies. We hated and were hated.

No more says Paul. You’re different now. Different than how you were. Different than how the world is. But not so you can get in a holy pile and feel superior about those reprobates. No, you’ve been called out to be sent back. To live and speak the gospel. To be salt of the earth and light to the world.

You know the truth of who Jesus is and who you are in Jesus. So discard the rags of the old life. I know they’re comfortable like an old sweatshirt. Pitch them. Get dressed in the new man. Sink into the clothes that fit your new identity. Suit up in Jesus. Deliberately. All day, every day.

This, Paul tells us, begins in the *mind*. In the thoughts. Be renewed. Refresh your thoughts by recalling who Jesus is and who you are in Jesus. Gather in honest, joyful community with other believers. Remind each other of the story. Lift up your hearts and voices. Renew your commitment. Renew your mind according to the truth, for the truth is in Jesus.

That's what we've been pointing to these last weeks. A time of dedication. A time where we renew our commitment to Jesus. We renew our mind by thinking about all he is and has done. We renew our lives by discarding the old futile ways of destructive, self-centered thought and action. We offer ourselves once more to Jesus. We deliberately discard the rags of the old life and get dressed in the beauty of the new life in Christ.

This has never been just a private affair. Such dedication is personal, deeply personal. But Christ always intended our dedication to him to occur in the fellowship of other believers.

Yes, all of life is ministry. Everything we do gets influenced by our commitment to Jesus. We glorify God in all our daily work. But at the very same time, the community of believers helps us focus our service to Jesus. We contribute to the ministry of the church, and to the mission that flows to the world from the church. Each of us gets granted specific ways to serve Jesus by serving his church, or serving the world through his church.

Over the last month we've been hearing from fellow members how they give glory to God as they steward God's grace in his church. We've received the beautiful catalogue of the more than 70 ways we can serve. And today we have opportunity to re-dedicate our lives to Jesus Christ. We'll speak aloud our trust in him. Then we will offer our dedication cards. Each household can write the ways its members are already serving Christ through his church. Offer those things you are already doing with fresh commitment and energy. If there's more you'd like to do, there's a place to mention that as well. Then, of course, there's a place to make a financial commitment for 2024. We're all in all that we do for Jesus through this beloved church.

In closing, I want to read you the covenant prayer that John Wesley used 250 years ago. Let it carry you along. Then, we'll take about five minutes to fill out our cards and to pray while music plays. When that concludes, I'll invite us to say together this prayer of dedication. Then from the back rows to the front, we will come forward and dedicate the cards that represent our lives.

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
Rank me with whom you will;
Put me to doing,
Put me to suffering;
Let me be employed for you,
Exalted for you,
Or brought low for you;
Let me be full,
Let me be empty,
Let me have all things,
Let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
To your pleasure and disposal.
I dedicate my time, talent and treasure to you.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth,
Let it be ratified in heaven.²

¹ Matthew S. Miller and D. Blair Smith, eds. *Generation to Generation: Writings in Honor of Douglas F. Kelly* (Fearn, Scotland: 2023), pp. 342-343.

² Adapted from John Wesley, *The Methodist Covenant Prayer*.