

## **4:20 *You Did Not So Learn Christ!***

### **Learning Christ to Overcome Death.**

Marius Victorinus: To believe in Christ is to obtain immortality and receive eternal life. For he himself is life. He himself is light. He himself is eternity. He himself is the one who overcomes death. He has by overcoming death overcome us too through the fulfilled mystery of salvation. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.20–21.<sup>10</sup>

## **4:21a *Hearing About and Being Taught in Christ***

### **Assuming You Have Heard.**

Jerome: If all who seem to hear Christ did indeed hear him, the apostle would never have said this to the Ephesians. They were those to whom he had already revealed the promises of Christ. Why would he then say conditionally: “if indeed you have heard him?” To know Christ is the same thing already as knowing virtue. To hear of Christ rightly is the same as being attentive to all the virtues: wisdom, justice, temperance, fortitude and the other names by which Christ is called. Therefore if anyone has indeed heard and learned Christ, he would not be living “in the futility of his mind” nor “be darkened in understanding” nor be “alienated from the life of God.” He would already have practical knowledge, since his ignorance would have been dispelled, his darkness illuminated and every blindness lifted from the eyes of his heart. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.20.<sup>12</sup>

## **4:21b *Truth is in Jesus***

### **In Jesus the Truth of God Has Appeared.**

Jerome: On the one hand the name Jesus refers to the man who was assumed by the Word, the man born from the Virgin. <sup>13</sup> ... Then again it refers to the Word of God: “for to us there is one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” <sup>14</sup> ... When Paul says “as truth is in Jesus,” he is speaking of the temple of God in which God the Word dwells. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. <sup>15</sup> God is the Word. As life dwells in him, so he also is life. <sup>16</sup> ... In this same way the Son too may be called the truth, and truth may be said to dwell in him. In saying this we do not separate God the Word from the humanity he assumed. The man he assumed is not someone else. According to our understanding of certain passages

we give different titles to him whom we believe to be the one Son of Man and Son of God, both before and after the virgin birth.... In none of the patriarchs, in none of the prophets, in none of the apostles did truth reside as it did in Jesus. For others know in part and prophesy in part and see “as through a glass darkly.”<sup>17</sup> In Jesus alone the truth of God has appeared. He confidently asserts “I am the truth.”<sup>18</sup> Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.21.<sup>19</sup>

## **4:22a *Put Off the Old Nature***

### **The Old Nature Is Put Off.**

Origen: The “old man”<sup>20</sup> includes all born as earthly men in their old nature.<sup>21</sup> It is this “old man,” this ancient condition of humanity, that is put off in Christ. Although his body continues, he nonetheless undergoes a change to new life engendered by living baptism. What he was has been “put off.” His old life is renewed by the holy water and the copious mercy of the anointing. He becomes new rather than old, whole rather than corrupt, fresh rather than enfeebled, an infant rather than an old man, eternal rather than ephemeral. On Psalm 91.12–13.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Old Nature Aged by Wickedness.**

Jerome: The “old nature” whom he tells them to put off has, in my opinion, been aged by wickedness. For, going constantly astray in his former way of life and in the desires of waywardness and acting like a beast in works of corruption, he himself suffers corruption and decay.... But the Word of God kills in such a way as to make the dead one come alive. He then seeks the Lord whom he did not know before his death. He does not corrupt but kills the old man.<sup>24</sup> ... As the outer man decays the inner man is renewed. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.22.<sup>25</sup>

## **4:22b *Corrupt Through Deceitful Lusts***

### **Lusts Deceive.**

Chrysostom: As his lusts become corrupt, so does he himself. How do his lusts become corrupt? Everything is finally dissolved in death. Remember the psalm that says “in that very day” [of his death] “his thoughts perish.” “Beauty departs. It dies and decays at the approach of illness or old age. So does bodily vigor. Even luxury itself does not afford the same comfort in old age.” ... Pleasures often are destructive. They

end up being not really pleasures but bitterness and deceit and pretense, like a theatrical illusion. Homily on Ephesians 13.4.22.26

### ***4:23 Renewed in the Spirit of One's Mind***

#### **The Mind Renewed.**

Origen: As there are many spirits, each has its proper abode. There is a spirit proper to your mind. When your mind is detoxified and expels confusions, the spirit of your mind renews you by taking up its dwelling within you. Epistle to the Ephesians.27

#### **The Spirit of Our Mind.**

Jerome: We are not being renewed in our thinking process apart from the renewal of our spirits. Nor are we renewed in our spirits without thinking. We are being jointly renewed "in the spirit of our mind." Hence as we sing psalms in the spirit, so we also sing them in our thoughts. As we pray in the spirit, so we also pray in our thoughts. The renewal of "the spirit of our mind" means that when the thought is clear and pure ... then the spirit is rightly joined to it. They are so coupled as if by a cohesive glue that we no longer speak simply of spirit but of "the spirit of our mind." Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.23–24.28

### ***4:24 Putting on the New Nature***

#### **Created after the Likeness of God.**

Marius Victorinus: He is calling us to live as one whose thoughts come from the Spirit, who is himself once again becoming the spiritual man created by God. We are to live in the likeness of God, just as God intended when he said: "Let us make humanity in our own image and likeness." 29 Admittedly God has no face or physical aspect. God is Spirit. So we too have been created according to God, to think according to the Spirit and thus to allow nothing to drag us down to worldly and unworthy thoughts. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.23–24.30

#### **The Clothing of the Baptized.**

Chrysostom: When one is already clothed, how is it said that one must further "put on" a new nature? New clothing was once put on in baptism. The new clothing now being put on is the new way of life and

conduct that flows from baptism. There one is no longer clothed by deceitful desires but by God's own righteousness. Homily on Ephesians 13.4.24.<sup>31</sup>

### **Putting on the New Nature.**

Gregory of Nyssa: 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. Against Eunomius 3.1.52.<sup>32</sup>

### **The New Person Is Created.**

Jerome: The metaphors of creating and establishing are never spoken of in Scripture except in great works. The world is created. A city is established. But observe that a house, however grand it may be, is more commonly said to be built than established or created. Note then that it is a great work of God when it is said that "the new person is created by God in Christ." This creature towers over the other creatures. This creature alone is said to have been established in the same way as the world was established, from "the beginning of God's ways,"<sup>33</sup> when all the elements first came into being. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.23–24.<sup>34</sup>

## **4:25a *Let Everyone Speak Truth***

### **First We Must Put Away Lying.**

Augustine: It is written, "The mouth that lies destroys the soul."<sup>2</sup> ... Therefore the apostle puts truth telling in the first place when he commands us to put off the "old nature," under which name all sins are understood, saying "therefore, putting off lying speak the truth." On Lying 6.<sup>3</sup>

### **Treat the Neighbor As We Wish Him to Become.**

Augustine: Let no one mistake this. The apostle is not giving us room to tell a lie to those who are not yet members of Christ with us. The point of the saying is that each of us should consider everyone as we wish him to become, even if he has not become so.... We ought to deal with a person in such a way that he will cease to be an outsider. Regard him as your neighbor already, rather than as an outsider. It may be that, because of the fact that he is not yet a partaker of our faith and sacraments, certain truths must be concealed from him. But that is no reason for telling him falsehoods. Against Lying 15.<sup>4</sup>

## **4:25b *Members One of Another***

### **Members One of Another Speak the Mystery of God's Truth to One Another.**

Jerome: To be members one of another points to a great mystery. He is speaking of those who are very close to us in faith. For people are not generally "members one of another." But the faithful indeed are members of the faithful. Christians are members of the body of Christ. We are members with the saints who embody purity of heart and consummate goodness.... Hence we are being instructed to speak intimately of the truth of this mystery with the neighbor—to speak of the fullness of God's truth. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.25.<sup>5</sup>

## **4:26a *Being Angry But Not Sinning***

### **How These Two Precepts Interrelate.**

Chrysostom: Note Paul's persistent wisdom. He speaks first to prevent our sinning. If we do not listen, he does not abandon us. His role as a spiritual father does not allow him to give up on us easily. It is like the doctor who tells the sick person what he must do. If the patient refuses to hear him, he does not write him off. Rather he continues to care for him by giving him further persuasive counsel. So too does Paul. He has already said, "Do not lie." But suppose anger should arise from lying. He then deals with this. What does he say? "Be angry and do not sin." It is better not to grow angry at all. But if one ever does fall into anger he should at least not be carried away by it toward something worse. Homily on Ephesians 14.4.25–27.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Double Sense of Anger.**

Jerome: This is taken from the fourth psalm, 8 as I am sure no one doubts. It may seem contrary to what is said of anger elsewhere, that we must put away all anger. 9 ... It is an oversimplified interpretation that does harm, especially when people imagine that the constraints against anger are being here relaxed. It is not only among us but among philosophers too that anger is spoken of in a double sense. Anger emerges first when we are understandably aroused by a natural stimulus after being wounded by an injury. Or it arises when, after the impulse has abated and our rage has been restrained, the mind is capable of judgment but nonetheless we find ourselves desiring vengeance upon the one who is thought to have inflicted the wound. In this [verse] Paul is speaking of the first kind of anger. He is allowing to us as vulnerable humans that in the face of some undeserved event we may be moved to some level of

annoyance, as if a light breeze were disturbing the serenity of the mind. But on no account are we to be carried into swelling rapids by the impulse of rage. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.26.10

#### ***4:26b Not Letting the Sun Go Down on One's Anger***

##### **Do Not Let the Sun Leave You as Enemies, Lest Anger Increase Overnight.**

Chrysostom: Do you wish to have your fill of anger? One hour, or two or three is enough for you. But do not let the sun go down and leave you both as enemies. It was God's goodness that did not leave us in anger. He did not let us part in enmity. He shed his light upon those of us who were sinners. So when evening is coming on, be reconciled. Quell the evil impulses while they are fresh. For if night overtakes you, the next day will not be enough time to extinguish the further evil which has been increasing overnight. Homily on Ephesians 14.4.25–27.11

#### ***4:27 Giving No Opportunity to the Devil***

##### **How the Devil Gains Entry.**

Origen: He is showing us how an opportunity is being given to the devil by these acts and desires. Once he has entered our body, he takes full possession of us. Or if he cannot take full possession, he at least pollutes the soul, having stuck his flaming darts into us unawares. At times these pierce us with a wound that goes down very deep. At other times we are merely temporarily inflamed. But it is indeed seldom that these burning darts are easily extinguished. They find their place to wound. On First Principles 3.2.4.12

##### **Free Persons Remain Responsible for What They Allow the Devil to Do.**

Marius Victorinus: The devil can do nothing to us unless we ourselves willingly allow him to do so. This is true in all our acts. Thus we are masters of our own will; otherwise we would deserve no good return for our good acts and no punishment for our bad acts. The devil's opportunity arises from our own vice. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.27.13

## **4:28a No Longer Stealing**

### **Persisting in Sin.**

Marius Victorinus: Sin does not consist in simply committing sin but persisting in it. If so, there is always a place for repentance. There is a place for correction. So the apostle says: “let the one who has stolen not steal again.” This should be applied not only to stealing but also to all sin. Anyone who has sinned in any way is now called not to sin again. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.28.15

### **The Subtle Temptation of Theft.**

Jerome: Those who live in the midst of this life’s intense business appear to be forced, for the sake of food and necessary provisions, to buy and sell certain things and to seek unfair profit from business. It is difficult even for those who have been set free from the other passions—namely fornication, idolatry, adultery and murder—to escape being caught by this subtle vice. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.28.16

## **4:28b Doing Honest Work**

### **4:28c Giving to Those in Need**

### **4:29a Not Speaking Evil**

#### **Labor from the Hands, Not Evil Talk from the Mouth.**

Chrysostom: What is corruption? It is what he elsewhere calls idleness: detraction, insult, facetiousness. This is how Paul trims away the roots of anger, by reducing lying, theft and even unseasonable speech. Homily on Ephesians 14.4.29.21

#### **A Good Word Gives Grace to the Hearer.**

Jerome: A good word is one that serves to build upon the occasion, communicating grace to the hearers because it teaches them to pursue virtues and shun vices. An evil word is one that prompts them to sin and rather drives them headlong into disaster.... Whenever we say what is not in season or inappropriate for the context, or that which does not contribute to the good of the hearers, an evil word proceeds from our mouth.... Even if we do no direct harm, yet we are not thereby building up. We shall pay the penalty of an evil word. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.29.22

## **4:29b Edifying Words**

### **Upbuilding Speech.**

Chrysostom: This means: “whatever edifies your neighbor, say this and nothing more.” ... Say “only such as is good.” The flood of words is vast. Paul is right to charge us to use language carefully. He gives us a pattern for doing this. Of what then are we to speak? “Whatever edifies,” he says. Why? “So the one who hears may be grateful to you.” Suppose your brother has committed fornication. Do not lord it over him. Do not gloat. That will not help your brother but damage him. It is as if you were driving a nail into him. If you counsel him, do so in a gracious manner. Show him how to keep his mouth clean. Teach him not to disparage anyone. Make his instruction your first concern. Then you have rendered him a great service. And if you speak with him about abstinence, discretion and alms, all these things soothe his soul, and he will give great thanks to you. Homily on Ephesians 14.4.29.23

## **4:30a Not Grieving the Holy Spirit of God**

### **An Arrogant Word Grieves the Spirit.**

Chrysostom: This is a particularly awful and fearful saying. It reminds us of what he said to the Thessalonians: “Whoever disregards this disregards not man but God.”<sup>24</sup> ... If you say an arrogant word, if you strike your brother, you have not merely hurt him but have grieved the Spirit. He contrasts such arrogance with the benevolence of God in order to sharpen the admonition. Homily on Ephesians 14.4.30.25

## **4:30b Sealed for the Day of Redemption**

### **The Seal of the Spirit.**

Jerome: That we have been “sealed” with the Holy Spirit means that both our spirit and our soul are impressed with God’s own seal, signifying that we belong to him. By this we receive in ourselves that image and likeness in which we were created at the outset... You are sealed so that you may be preserved to the end. You may show that seal on the day of redemption, pure and unblemished and not damaged in any part. You are thereby ready to be counted with those who are redeemed. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.30.27



## **4:31a Putting Away Bitterness, Wrath, Anger, Clamor and Slander**

### **Putting Away Slander.**

Origen: People who insult others are said to slander or blaspheme against those whom they insult.... One blasphemes when one makes a true doctrine appear false or a false one true, especially when one speaks of God or matters pertaining to God. Epistle to the Ephesians.<sup>28</sup>

### **Distinguishing These Five Terms.**

Marius Victorinus: He adds five terms briefly at the end—bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander. Then at the very end he has added the summarizing phrase with all malice. Bitterness consists in envying and speaking ill of others and similar actions. Wrath consists in the lust for vengeance and punishment. Anger is the impulse of a mind boiling over and upheaving beyond what is reasonable. Clamor is a kind of insane, uncontrolled utterance. And blasphemy is wicked thought or speech that attacks God and is primarily directed against God. Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.31.<sup>29</sup>

### **Types of Aggression.**

Jerome: Wrath is the out spewing of indignation in the mind when anger overflows. Bitterness and wrath are varieties of anger. Anger desires vengeance after rage has been subdued. Anger wishes to harm the one by whom it believes itself injured.... Vengeance wants to return evil to the one it considers guilty of injury. A Christian ought not to return evil for evil but “overcome evil with good.”<sup>30</sup> Epistle to the Ephesians 3.4.31.<sup>31</sup>

### **Putting Away Bitterness.**

Chrysostom: All this bitterness is not merely to be cleansed but to be “put away” altogether. Why should anyone try to contain it or hold it in? Why keep the beast of anger around so as to have to watch it constantly? It is possible to banish it, to expel it and drive it off to some mountain place. Homily on Ephesians 15.4.31.<sup>32</sup>

## **4:31b *With All Malice***

## **4:32 *Kind, Tenderhearted, Forgiving***

### **After Cutting Weeds, Plant Good Seeds.**

Chrysostom: Tell me what good it is to weed a garden if we do not plant good seed.... Sow good habits and dispositions. To be free from a bad habit does not mean we have formed a good one. We need to take the further step of forming good habits and dispositions to replace what we have left behind. Homily on Ephesians 16.4.31–32.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Value of Forgiveness.**

Chrysostom: Patience means practicing forgiveness. To give patience is a far greater gift than to give money. The one who gives money to one who asks of him does indeed do a fine and admirable deed, but such a gift touches only the body. Spiritual gifts touch the soul with redemption. Hence one who forgives does good both to his own soul and to that of the one who has received forgiveness. Homily on Ephesians 16.4.31–32.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Risk of Forgiving.**

Chrysostom: Paul's words contain a great mystery. "For," he says in effect, "God took a chance in forgiving you. He placed his own Son in jeopardy. To forgive you he even sacrificed his Son. But you have received forgiveness time after time, at no risk or expense, yet you do not forgive." Homily on Ephesians 17.4.32–5.2.<sup>36</sup>

### **Gentleness Overcomes Bitterness.**

Jerome: Paul wants us to be gentle, approachable people, people who have left anger, bitterness, wrath and slander behind. If we are merciful and serene, taking the initiative in reaching out to others, our very approachability will overcome the shyness and fear of those for whom we reach out. Epistle to the Ephesians 3.5.1.<sup>37</sup>