

July 8. Read Romans 6:5. One of the most important realities in the Christian life is that we have a union with Christ. Note the words “we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” There is a union between Christ and Christians so that what happened to Christ is counted by God as happening to us. His death is our death. God establishes this union, as 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, “Because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus.” God establishes a union between believers and Christ, in a way that makes it fitting for him to count Christ’s death to be our death. This death is something that happened in history, once for all. It is applied to us now through our faith, but since Christ died in history only once, and Romans 6:5 says we were united to that, our death happened, in God’s way of seeing things, on the day Christ died. Here the apostle Paul teaches that in Christ — that is, in our union with Christ that God established — we are dead to sin, meaning this: In our truest position and our truest identity, we are completely and finally dead to sin — both its guilt and its power. This is decisive, unrepeatable, and unchangeable. This is the foundation for all our warfare against sin, and all our progress in holiness. The Christian life is an already and a not-yet experience of this identity in union with Christ. What happened to Christ Jesus historically and finally and unchangeably — and to us in him — is applied to us not all at once in its fullness, but some now completely, and some now progressively, and all fully in the age to come. For example, we are already fully forgiven and acquitted and declared righteous and justified in our union with Christ by faith alone. And we are already delivered from slavery to sin, that is, from the power of sin as the defining direction of our lives. And we are already able, by faith, to grow more and more triumphant over sin in our daily life. But we are not-yet perfected in our daily, earthly experience. We must fight the fight of faith and become in experience, by faith, what we are perfectly in our union with Christ. So, you are not left to live in your own strength today, but you are free to live in the power of believing God’s promises for what he will do for you because of your union with Christ

July 9. Read Galatians 4:12, 19. When the apostle Paul says, “Become as I am,” he means, “Die like I have died and live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20) so that it is his life in you that shapes and forms who you are.”

Paul’s whole ministry was like a mother in labor pains — he travailed to give birth to people who had Christ taking shape in their lives. “My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” That’s the main point of this section of Galatians: “Become as I am: have Christ formed in you.”

The biblical quest for spiritual formation is a quest to be so shaped from within by the presence of the living Christ that we are no longer “conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewal of [our] mind” (Romans 12:1–2). To be so shaped by our union with him that “the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Corinthians 4:10). To be so formed and dominated by Christ that we must say with Paul after a life of labor, “It was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). How does this happen? How is Christ formed in your life? The answer is: by faith. Faith is the assurance that what God will make of you, as Christ is formed in your life, is vastly to be preferred over what you can make of yourself. Faith is the confidence that the demonstration of Christ’s work in your life is more wonderful than all the praise you could get for yourself by being a self-made man or woman. Faith is a happy resting in the all-sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross, what he is doing now in our heart, and what he promises to do for us forever.

July 10. Read Ephesians 4:22–24. Christianity is not like any other school. It is not a moral self-improvement course. You don't just sign up and work hard to change yourself. That's the school of legalism, not the school of grace. In the school of Christ change comes in a totally different way, by grace through faith, so that the schoolmaster gets all the glory, not the students. That's why Paul describes the coursework with such strange language. It's like nothing you have experienced anywhere before entering this school. In the school of grace, your new clothes are created (Ephesians 4:24). God creates the new person that we must put on. The new person is the bundle of attitudes and emotions and practices that make up the new you. That is what verse 24 says God creates. He creates the new you. The bundle of attitudes and emotions and practices are created after his own likeness in righteousness and holiness, the course catalogue says. This is totally unlike any other school in the world. We are given the assignment to become holy; but then we are told that God creates our holiness. This is a very strange school. Look at Ephesians 2:10 for one of the strangest sentences of all in the course description: We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. How mind boggling is this? We are God's workmanship, God's creation. And not only that, the works that we are assigned to do — he has already prepared those, too! Who is working in this school, anyway?! Do you see why Paul can't just say, "Okay, you're a Christian now; get rid of your bad habits and get some good ones"? That is the curriculum in the school of legalism: God saved you, now improve yourself. No! In the school of grace, God creates the new person — and that includes all the new attitudes and emotions and practices that we are supposed to put on. When your mind is filled with Christ's love and with all the fullness of God, then the spirit of your mind is renewed and freed from the deceit of the world. And out of that renewed mind comes new attitudes and emotions and practices, and they clothe you with righteousness and holiness. And this new person that you become is indeed the work of God himself, and to him belongs all the glory forever and ever.

July 11. Read Romans 13:14. The assumption in the larger section of Romans 13 is that those who belong to Christ are “children of the day.” We have already passed from darkness to light. We have already been transferred from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of Christ. We are already new creatures in Christ. We are already children of God. What remains is for us to dress like it, to live like it, and to fight like it. The clothes and the fight do not make us children of the light. They show that we are children of the light. Therefore, in Romans 13:14 putting on Christ each day doesn’t mean wearing him as a nuisance or a burden. As a child of God already, it means wearing him as protection (trusting him), wearing him as the supplier of all your future needs (hoping in him), and wearing him as your supreme treasure (loving him). “Put on Jesus Christ” means put him on as the parachute because you are skydiving behind enemy lines. It means put him on as the high-impact, protective, anti-explosive suit when you disarm the bombs of the devil. It means put him on as the fire-proof suit when you rescue sinners from the flames of hell. It means put him on as a bullet-proof vest when you confront the pistols of sin and unbelief. “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” means put him on as a badge that admits you to all the resources of heaven that you need to do his will. It means put him on as the best intercom system that ever was so that there can be constant communication with the one whom you love above all others and who is himself everything you need. “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ” means trust him, hope in him, cherish him for all these things. The night is far gone (Romans 13:12), the day is at hand; take off the pajamas of sin and put on the armor of light. The Christian life is not just waking; it is war. The armor of light is faith and hope and love. So put on faith in Jesus and hope in Jesus and love for Jesus. That is what it means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

July 12. Read 1 Peter 2:9. There is a lot of talk in our day of self-identity. How do we view ourselves? It is an important question. And what I hope you hear from 1 Peter 2:9 is that Christian selfhood is not defined in terms of who we are in and of ourselves. It’s defined in terms of what God does to us and the relationship he creates with us and the destiny he appoints for us. In other words, as a Christian you cannot talk about your identity without talking about the action of God on you, the relationship of God with you, and the purpose of God for you. The biblical understanding of human self-identity is radically God-centered. Who am I? Who are you? You are a God-chosen one, a God-pitied one, a God-possessed one, a God-sanctified one. The very language of our identity in 1 Peter 2:9 necessitates that God be included as the one who acts. Our identity is not an end in itself, but for the sake of priestly service in the world, which Peter defines as “proclaim[ing] the excellencies of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” God made us who we are so that we might proclaim the excellency of his freedom in choosing us. The excellency of his grace in pitying us. The excellencies of his authority and power in possessing us. The excellencies of his worth and purity in making us holy. In other words, he has given us our identity in order that his identity might be proclaimed in the world through us. God made us who we are so we could make known who he is. Our identity is for the sake of making known his identity. The meaning of our identity is that the excellency of God be seen in us. Therefore, being a Christian and making the greatness of God known are almost identical. We can do it in church services with preaching and singing and praying and reading. We can do it at work as we tell people what we love about God and why we think he is great. And we can do it in a thousand different ways of love that suit our situation and personality