

# Living A New Life

## *Letter to the Colossians*

If you want to play it safe when reading the letters of the Apostle Paul, just read the first half. The first part of his letters is usually about belief. It's the theory. It's the doctrine. It's the academic stuff. In almost all of Paul's letters he follows the same pattern. Teach the theory in the first part and then tell them how to put it into practice in the second part. That's the part we're on to now in Colossians. Putting what we believe into practice. That was a whole new thought to a lot of his readers, most of whom had practiced religions where you could do your own religious thing and go away and live as you liked. It was sort of like going to church to confess your sins, and then going out and having a good time.

So here is the first part of the practical application. **"Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."** (Colossians 3:1-4) What he is saying to the Colossians, and to us is this. "Now that you have been raised with Christ to a new life, you need to live it. Set your heart and mind on heavenly things." When Paul was talking about the mind, he is not just talking about intellect, but our whole inner self. All the time within us there is a constant stream of thoughts, perceptions, feelings, understandings, intentions, and desires. That stream of thought determines what we do and what we say. Most of the time we are not even aware of what's going on inside of us, but it's always happening.

The computer I use, and the computer you use, has a whole bunch of default settings. There are defaults for the way the screen is set up, the style of type we use, the size of the page we write on, the printer settings – and that's just for word processing. When you get a new computer, the first thing you have to do is set the defaults. Once those defaults are set, every time it boots up, that's what it will be set to. If you have ever crashed your computer, you will know what a huge hassle it is to get all those settings back again. But once you have them established, you can get on and use the computer in the way you need to. When I'm using my computer, I'm not thinking all the time about the default settings, because it's operating the way it should.

### **The Default Of The Flesh Or The Default Of The Spirit?**

Now here's the deal. Before a person is transformed by the Spirit of God, and raised to this new life with Christ, the default setting for life are the things of the flesh. We are focussed on earthly things. When he is writing to the Romans, Paul talks about those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, and those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. We can choose whether we have an earthly mindset, or a mindset that reflects the fact that we are living in the Kingdom of God. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life. If we have been raised to a new life with Christ, the default setting of our lives is meant to be on heavenly things, not on earthly things. And the ultimate test of your default setting is when you come to die. People whose default setting is on heaven have this deep sense of assurance that heaven is where they are meant to be.

To set our minds on things above means to measure everything in the light of eternity." Ask yourself "What's going to last for all eternity?" When you begin to ask that question, everything begins to change. In the light of eternity does it matter if you never get to own a Ferrari? In the light of eternity does it matter if you don't ever get to be the president of the company? When you measure your life by the values of the Kingdom of God, giving becomes more important than getting. Serving becomes more important than being served. Forgiving becomes more important than getting your own back. People become more important than programs. When you have died to the value systems of this world, everything changes.

Arthur Stace was an alcoholic and completely illiterate. He lived in the streets of Sydney, Australia, regarded by many who saw him as a lost cause. One Sunday night in 1932 he entered St Barnabas' Anglican Church on Broadway, Sydney, and heard the Reverend T. C.

Hammond preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Arthur was convicted by the Spirit of God. He left the church, crossed the road, and sat under a tree in Victoria Park where he committed his life to Jesus Christ. He had become a new creation. Later that year he was at the Burton Street Baptist Church the evangelist John G Ridley preaching. In his urgent, commanding voice, John Ridley cried, "Eternity! Eternity! Oh, that this word could be emblazoned across the streets of Sydney!"

Arthur Stace the little man who still could not read or write left that church, took some yellow chalk, bent down and wrote one word on the footpath. And throughout the night for the next 40 years, while Sydney slept, Arthur would take his chalk and write in immaculate copperplate handwriting the word "eternity" on footpaths, entrances to the train station, and anywhere else he thought it would catch people's attention.

As the year 2000 was welcomed, the word "eternity" in Stace's handwriting, was emblazoned across the face of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and was seen around the world. Because Sydney's fireworks display was the first of the international celebrations to be telecast around the globe, people in every continent witnessed the miracle that God performed when he touched the life of one little, 'insignificant' man - Arthur Stace - a man who heard the voice of God and responded by committing his life to 'preaching' his one-word sermon: Eternity.

Live life in terms of eternity. It makes all the difference. Paul says that when we die with Christ our life is hidden with Christ in God? Now where is Christ? He is in glory with the Father. Do you know what that means? It means that there is an awful lot of you that is already in heaven. As you go along as a Christian you make more and more of an investment in heaven. Eventually you appear with Christ in glory. So the trick is to keep putting to death the old nature, and making more and more of an investment in heaven.

Here's the second part of the [scripture for today](#).

***"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all". (Colossians 3:5-11 NIV)***

A long time ago there was a famous Baptist preacher in London named Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon once heard another preacher at a meeting teaching that once we are in Christ, all of our old sinful nature instantly dies, and we are never again troubled by impure thoughts or sinful actions. He was teaching that was no longer possible for us to sin. Spurgeon thought this was so much nonsense that he decided to put it to the test. So the next morning at breakfast, he poured a jug of milk over the man's head! The unholy reaction immediately disproved this doctrine of sinless perfection.

The old nature doesn't die of its own accord. It has to be put to death. Sin does not die of natural causes. It has to be put to death by a whole series of deliberate acts. There has to be a deliberate choosing to turn from self to Christ. We are to put to death everything that is opposed to the Kingdom of God.

### **So what needs to die?**

Paul deals with two major areas that need to be put to death – Old ways of thinking and old ways of speaking.

#### **1. Our thoughts.**

Paul talks about sexual immorality – impurity, lust, evil desires, greed. Basically he's talking about sexual sins, and he's saying that these things must die. The battle for sexual purity is about the battle that takes place in your thought life. Every person who gets involved in sexual sin has first lost the battle in their mind. The mind is the battleground. If we lose the battle over our thought life, then sinful behaviour results. When a person falls into sexual sin that's not something that just happens. Sexual sin is the result of conscious choices that have been made a long way back. Lustful thoughts that weren't put to death. Impure thoughts that were

not dealt with. Winning the battle over pornography and sexual immorality begins right back in the space between your ears. If you choose to, and with God's help, you can put those thoughts to death if you really want to. Our outward actions are the result of what we choose to think.

We're told to put these things to death. That doesn't just mean avoiding certain behaviours. It doesn't just mean avoiding having an affair or avoiding looking at pornography. This is about the inside of my life. Do you think that in Muslim cultures the men don't have lustful thoughts just because the women are wearing a full length Burka? You can go and live in a monastery for the rest of your life, but it doesn't deal with what is going on inside your head. Paul is talking about becoming dead to thoughts that would lead us into sin. It means becoming so filled with the life of Christ that there is nothing within us that would want to respond to that or to walk down that road.

## **2. Our speech.**

The second major area Paul deals with are the things that we speak. He says we need to rid ourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language and lies. Now that we're in Christ we no longer have a right to say just what we think. We don't have the right to lose our cool whenever we feel like it. We no longer have a right to speak nasty things to people or to gossip about others or tell dirty jokes or use foul language. We no longer have right to tell lies, or half truths or to exaggerate or distort the facts. How come? Because the right to do all those things died when we were buried with Christ. We are new people in Christ. We can never be the same again.

### **Whatever Is Inside Our Heart And Our Mind Will Leak Out Of Us.**

Jesus said that every good tree bears good fruit and every bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. What ever goes on inside the tree determines what sort of fruit it will produce. It's inevitable. Whatever is going on inside of us is going to get expressed in what we do and what we say. You can always tell what's on the inside of a person when they are bumped. Whatever is on the inside will spill out. The goal has to be to change the inner life, not just to dress up the outside. That means we have to be transformed from within. That way, kindness and patience and all the fruit of the Spirit will be something that flows out from the inside rather than something we have to work at.

### **How Do We Die To This Stuff?**

How do we die to anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language? How we die to lying to each other? Is achieved through trying really, really hard not to do these things? Trying really hard won't do it. We have all had that experience a hundred times and we all know it just doesn't work.

How do we change what's going on within? In Romans 12:1& 2 Paul says "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will*".

A renewed mind does not come about through information but through training.

A few years ago I heard a pilot talk of his time in the Royal Air Force. His particular specialty was flying high speed fighter jets at around the speed of sound about 100 feet off the ground. How did he learn to do that? How did he acquire the discipline, the strength and the concentration needed to do something that could easily have killed him? Training. Every day, hour after hour, getting a little better until flying at those heights and speeds was second nature to him. The renewal of the mind comes about when you enter into a life of training. Training means you orient your life around certain activities which enables you to do what you can't to right now.

A disciple is a person who enters into the life of training that Jesus teaches us. The spiritual disciplines are the practices that I do with my body to bring it closer to God. Worship is a discipline I do in bringing my body to worship with other Christians. Solitude is a discipline I do with my body to separate myself from the pressures that want to squeeze me into the shape of the world. Reading and reflecting on scripture is something I do with my body to train my mind to think on the things of the Kingdom. All these practices disrupt the normal flow of

automatic thoughts and feelings. The result of doing these things is that our minds are renewed and our life is transformed.

It doesn't matter how slow the progress is in this, as long as you keep offering yourself to God and choosing to die to sin, then you are a growing disciple.

If you are not sure how to make a start in this, can I suggest that you go back and listen to the message David Grebert brought us a few weeks back, and take a Jesus walkabout. As I conclude today, I want to give you a short poem. For the sake of those listening to this on audio, I'll read it.

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS**

**by Portia Nelson**

### **I**

**I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
I fall in.  
I am lost ... I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes me forever to find a way out.**

### **II**

**I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place  
but, it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.**

### **III**

**I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
my eyes are open  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.**

### **IV**

**I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.**

### **V**

**I walk down another street.**

*David McChesney, Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland*