

Dying to Live

(Colossians 3:1-4)

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CONVERSION to Christ changes the rule, relationship, outlook, and actions of our lives. This new life orders its priorities out of the mind of Christ.

Colossians is a book that points to Jesus as the center, purpose, and power of life. He is the focal point of history (1:15-20), the purpose of life (1:24—2:5), and the power for new life and glory (2:6, 7).

But how do these truths relate to everyday life? After all, life is not lived in theological speculation or in right comprehensions about the person and work of Christ alone. Life has struggles with priorities, pressures, anger, problems with marriage, difficulties on the job, and problems relating as Christians to outsiders who operate out of a different mindset.

What do right views and a right relationship with Jesus have to do with life's everyday struggles? Let us begin at the beginning—the struggle to order our priorities out of a Christian framework. Usually, it is not easy. Many ideas compete for our attention. How can we order our priorities to be pleasing to Him and to feel good about ourselves and our relationships? As in all of the Christian life, the answers are not found in platitudes or three-step formulas. The answers are found in the significance and dynamic of a new life in Christ. Let us take a backward look at our conversion to recall its meaning and impact upon life and its priorities now.

WHAT HAPPENED AT CONVERSION? (2:9-15)

At the time of conversion, a participation in

the “circumcision of Christ” took place (2:11). Paul was not referring to their circumcision as Jewish infants, but to “His crucifixion.” He was referring to a symbolical sharing in the death of Jesus. The Christian circumcision is of the heart, not the body (Philippians 3:3; Romans 2:28, 29). In baptism the Christian puts off “the body of flesh.” Baptism signifies the removal of the “flesh,” the “putting off of the old man,” a “dying to self and the domination of its sinful nature.” The believer puts off “the whole personality organized for, and geared into rebellion against God.” Repentance changes the mind and the direction, but only our participation in the death of Christ can actually destroy the power of sin and free us from enslavement to it (Romans 6:6). As Jesus died for our sins, He enables us through His death to die to our sins.

Second, a participation in the burial of Christ took place (2:12). The “body of flesh” is not only put off; in baptism it is put away out of sight. Baptism signifies and enables us through God's power to make the power and domination of sin things of the past. By being buried with Him, we lose ourselves and our old nature in Him. “He who has died is freed from sin” (Romans 6:7).

Third, a participation in the resurrection of Christ took place (2:12, 13). Baptism not only proclaims that the old life is over, but that a new life is begun. A Christian shares in resurrection power! The power of baptism is the working of God—the same working that raised Jesus (2:12). The God who raised Jesus makes us “alive together with Him” (2:13). Continued faith in the resurrected Christ enables His power to ener-

gize and maintain our life in Him (cf. Philippians 3:9-11).

What did Jesus make possible through His death, burial, and resurrection and our identification with Him in baptism? He broke us clean away from our past. He freely forgave our sins. Sin, our violation of God's law, represented a mountain of bankruptcy standing as a witness against us. This signed confession of indebtedness, Jesus cancelled in His death. He took this bond of indebtedness along with the document, ordinances, and all, and nailed them to His cross as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers who were holding it over us as a threat (2:14). A song which Christians sing says,

We owed a debt we could not pay,
He paid a debt He did not owe.

He shamed, embarrassed, and destroyed the forces that were against us.

How do we participate in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection? We do so in baptism, but not in the mere act. We participate through faith in the working of God. What is the nature of this faith? It is repentance, a change of heart, identification with Him in His death, and surrender to Him and His purpose. Life is to be forevermore changed through our faith in Christ and the working of God in us.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CONVERSION MAKE?

First, it makes a change of rule (1:13) from the dominion of darkness into the rule of the Son. He directs, rules, and reigns. He is the sphere in which our lives are lived. We no longer yield to sin, but to God (Romans 6:13).

Second, it produces a change of relationship (1:22) from hostility, estrangement, and evil to a new relationship of harmony and holiness. We were once committed to our own way, but now we live in harmony with His. We were once under the influence of Satan, but now we are under the influence of the friendship of God.

Third, it leads to a change of thought (3:1-4). New life means new desires—"keep seeking things above" (3:1). New life means new thoughts—"set your mind on the things above" (3:2). Life is hid with Christ in God; we lose ourselves in Him. Life is no longer ordered by

worldly interests and selfish desires. Life is ordered by the person and life of Jesus revealed to us in Scripture.

Fourth, it causes a change of action (3:4—4:6). Such new life leads one to "put off" certain things and "put on" others. This new nature is constantly being "renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of . . . Him" (3:10). The new actions spring from a life rooted in the life of the Lord.

WHAT DOES NEW LIFE HAVE TO DO WITH ORDERING PRIORITIES?

We could have attempted to discuss and list the priorities of life as a code for decision-making, but that would not have fit the message of Colossians. Ordering priorities is not just following an outward code, although there are definite outward manifestations of the will of God by which to test ourselves. Establishing priorities is an everyday happening that springs from spiritual values. It is wisdom and discernment developed as fruit of a life rooted in Christ (Philippians 1:9-11). His values are honesty, integrity, love, purity, righteousness, marriage, and family. His values of the kingdom concern discipling, proclaiming, sharing, and giving. His values are of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

These values we have chosen because we have chosen Him. He is the embodiment of these values and more. Because He is of the Father, our values are of the Father. From deep within us springs the desire to know and glorify Him. He is not only our everything in theory, but also in life. We consciously seek the things above!

CONCLUSION

Do you know the frustration of a disjointed life that is driven by every wind of influence? Do you find yourself dominated by the world? Are you weak to choose spiritual values? Are you confused about priorities because you try to handle them without dying to self and living to Christ? Convert to Jesus. Commit yourself to new life, thought, and action. Let your roots run deep into the heart of Jesus. Do not take your eyes off Him. He can order your life and become the power for a life hidden with Christ in God. By dying to self and receiving new life from Him, your life can be lived with a new dimension—a spiritual dimension that orders your life.