

HOW SHOULD WE NOW LIVE?

SERIES: FREE AT LAST! THE NEW COVENANT AS A LIFESTYLE

By Ron R. Ritchie

A few months ago my wife and I traveled some distance to visit with one of our friends. When we arrived at his home, we were introduced to a man who I immediately felt was a kindred spirit. As the evening passed we talked about things that were happening in our lives, and he told us he was passing through a very difficult period in his life as his wife had just left him. He invited us to come by and visit him at his home the next day if we had time before we left to return home.

Before we caught our plane the next morning, we drove by his home with some friends. It was a mansion, not yet completely built. Great unfinished concrete walls surround the home. A marvelous set of hand-carved gates greeted us as we drove up. The man met us at these gates and his first words to us were, “Welcome to my Waterloo, to my field of absolute defeat. Welcome to my failure.” As we toured the house with him he told us the history behind his words. Thirteen years ago he dedicated himself to build a mansion for his wife. He visited Europe to research plans, brought in craftsmen from Mexico, built a special tool-shop, etc. But in the midst of what he called his “obsession,” his wife told him he was a “bore” and walked out on him, leaving him to his “Waterloo” alone.

We felt such compassion for him. He had lost his way, and he didn’t understand life or how life should be lived. As we had to leave to catch our plane, I told him I would write him a letter and share with him how the resurrected Jesus Christ could change his life and give him new life, eternal life—life as it was intended to be lived by Christ’s resurrection power. I did write that letter, and shortly afterward I received a call telling me he had been rushed to surgery for a bypass operation. I called him in the hospital and asked him to read the letter, but he said he was too weak to open it. I’m still praying for him, hoping that by God’s grace he will yet taste eternal life.

Isn’t it amazing how many people around you—your family, friends, people you work with—think they have life, yet from God’s perspective they haven’t a clue as to what life is all about? In his second letter to the young Christian church at Corinth, the apostle Paul sought to answer for his spiritual children, who were living in a secular, humanist society, the question so many Christians are asking today, “How should we now live?” Paul had already asked himself that question so he was ready with his two-part response. Let’s now consider the first part of his response.

We no longer live for ourselves

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

(2 Corinthians 5:11-15)

Paul begins, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord...” Earlier in verse 10, he said one of the motivating factors of his life and ministry was the daily realization of the coming “judgment seat of Christ.” As a servant of Christ he knew he was held accountable to the Lord for the motives behind his good works. When he was made aware by the Holy Spirit of fleshly motives he could judge them. But he wouldn’t always be aware of his motives, so he would have to wait until the Lord reviewed the “video tape” of his life as a Christian, in a time of evaluation (1 Corinthians 3:12-15), encouragement (1 Corinthians 4:3-5), and rewards (2 Corinthians 4:17).

A second motivating factor for the apostle was the “fear of the Lord.” This is not a “cowering” kind of fear, but is better described as “reverence.” Paul knew who God was and he felt respect, awe and honor for him. He knew that his God was a God of mercy, grace and power; that he was the God who raised his Son Jesus Christ from the dead. This God can save all who place their faith in him as Lord and Savior, and he can make them “alive in Christ.”

Further, the respect and honor he felt for the Lord gave him a strong desire “to persuade men.” Paul was hoping to prevail upon the minds of men by appealing to their sense of reason, presenting the good news of the gospel of Christ in such a way that their minds and hearts would be open. Paul was so convinced in his heart of this good news that he just couldn’t be silenced.

In fact, none of the apostles could be silenced following Pentecost for that matter. For instance, Peter and John were going to the temple one day to pray, but Peter ended up healing a lame man, preaching the gospel, being arrested and then freed by an angel, preaching again, and then being brought before the Supreme Court. All of this happened to him because he simply wanted to go to the temple for prayer! You may have a tendency to think, “today is going to be just like any other day,” but God may have vastly different plans for your day.

Just a few weeks after that same court had condemned Jesus, both Peter and John found themselves standing on the very same stones where Jesus had stood and proclaiming the gospel!

When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. ‘He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone.’ And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:7-12)

Peter also desired to “persuade men” about the power of Jesus Christ to save sinners. He too was motivated by “the judgment seat of Christ” and “the fear of Christ.”

Paul continues, “...but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that but we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.” Here the apostle is referring to the false teachers in Corinth who were attacking his position, his life and his message. Apparently as they watched him preach the gospel they said he was mad, and that he was recommending himself to the Corinthians so he could come back to Corinth later (2 Corinthians 3:1-3). But Paul resolved to live a life of transparency before both God and man, and allowed the accusations to fall

where they may. He would not be turned aside from his goal.

A third reason Paul was motivated to serve Christ is because “the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all.” The love of Jesus guarded him and controlled him, and while always being aware that Jesus loved him. Paul was overwhelmed by the unselfish, self-sacrificial love of the Messiah for his people Israel as well as the Gentiles. And that love was offered to all mankind who in Adam were rebelling against God. The issue between God and man is that man chose to freely separate himself from God, his Creator, by disobeying his command in the Garden of Eden. He reached for the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, hoping to become like God. Just to show that there is “nothing new under the sun,” in the opening page of the *Whole Earth Catalog* is the statement: “We are all gods and we might as well get good at it.” Man is still reaching for the fruit from that tree. Paul said in Romans, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Romans 5:12, 18).

Here is the result of the love of Christ, the good news: “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly...But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6, 8).

When one who is dead in his sins comes to realize his situation by the power of the Holy Spirit, and recognizes his need for Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, at that moment God identifies him spiritually with the death of Jesus. In other words, Jesus suffered physical death on the cross and those who trust in him as Lord died with him; that is, their flesh, the old nature in Adam died and was buried with him. Obviously, when one dies the power of sin has been broken, for sin cannot tempt one who is dead.

Continuing on, the apostle says, “therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” He died for all. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Those who believe in him will have life forever, *life as God intended it to be*. “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). So our Lord’s death dealt with the issue of sin and held back the wrath of God toward all who were called of him “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

As a result of that confession—and I don’t quite understand this, but I have certainly felt the results of it in my own life—I am made “alive in Christ.” When I was in my sin, I confessed Christ as my Lord and asked for forgiveness. I was spiritually placed into his death and burial. But then, according to the Scriptures, when Christ arose from the dead I arose with him. Now I have the same life he does, the life of God. That’s why Christians are so excited at Easter. They have already tasted the hope of eternal life. And that taste is but a down payment. Eternal life can be tasted by the joy and wholeness that peace with God brings. We are headed for a mansion which God has built with his own hands, which will house the Spirit within us forever. So we can rejoice with Peter, who said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).

Not only do believers have a new life in Christ, but by the power of the resurrected Lord they discover yet another new motive for living. Paul says, “...that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” Their lives become Christ-centered instead of self-

centered. At the Sunrise Service this past Easter morning I had the joy of watching one of my new friends share about his new life in Christ with the congregation. I know he was scared to death to do this. He was clinging to the Lord for the strength to speak as he had never done anything like this before. Here is part of what he said:

Since the day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, my life has never had more meaning. I never before had such a love for so many people. Suddenly life became very simple in a very complicated way. I understand now what it's all about, and it was right there in front of me all the time in my Bible. Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But I found that I couldn't do that alone. When I was the center of my life it was hard to put others first... [but when I asked] Christ to be the center of my life, with the power of the Holy Spirit living through me, Christ can do it for me. Life is so much more fulfilling in being able to do for others. It gives me a sense of joy and inner peace that I've never had before.

How should we now live, now that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, now that he is Lord and Savior of our lives? A relationship with God changes everything for us. God loves to challenge us to think through our actions since now our life, our time, and our money no longer belong to us. He wants us to be motivated by his love, by what Jesus has done for us. We are no longer to live for ourselves but for Christ who died for us. What a different approach to life than what we hear all around us today.

Live as Ambassadors for Christ

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says,

**"AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU,
AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU."**

Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION." (2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2)

In this next section, Paul begins by saying that from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Even though we once regarded Christ in this way we do so no longer. When you come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ he gives you new eyes to see. He sets you free from prejudice, bigotry, and self-righteousness, from judging others by outward appearances—money, status, speech, or physical appearance—free from placing people in boxes and then stamping them as approved or disapproved. Christ sets us free to see that we are valuable and worthy to hear the good news.

Last week I saw a very large man with long flowing blond hair and beard. He was wearing a tank top

and I could see that his entire upper body was covered with tattoos. He wore the usual belt and boots, keys hanging by his side, etc. and I thought to myself, “What a mess! This guy doesn’t know what life is all about.” I wanted to walk away from him because he didn’t look like me or act like me. From my perspective, he was a threat to me and I don’t like to be around people who threaten me. I want everyone to look and dress like I do. I want to feel safe. But Paul would say that as Christians we now have to regard such a man as savable; to look upon him with the compassion of Jesus and seek an opportunity to tell him the good news. Once I got over my own feelings and was set free by the Holy Spirit to be available, I so wanted an opportunity to talk with him.

Paul says that before he became a Christian, he saw Jesus in Jerusalem. But from his prideful, blind and jealous position as a Pharisee he regarded Jesus as nothing but a carpenter from Nazareth, a blasphemer and a political rebel. However, now that he has new eyes to see and a new heart, he sees Jesus as he truly is—the Messiah and King.

Paul continues, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” Not only are believers given new eyes, but they are given new minds to understand what God is doing, not only in their own lives but in the lives of other believers as well. When Jesus became their Lord and Savior, spiritually they were “born again.” They became new children of God. Being “born again” means the old “you” has died. The new self, the inner man, is now alive and pulsating with eternal life and is in the process of becoming like Christ.

Everyone experiences different stages of growth, so we cannot judge others because God is at work in them, just as he is in us. We are filled with hope because he promises to finish the work he began in us (Philippians 1:6). We love to see people come to know Jesus, but at the same time we want God to grow them up quickly so we can get along with them better. But as God is patient with us, we need to be very patient with each other. Let us pray for one another, encourage one another, admonish and build up one another and be involved with one another. God wants us to have a love for one another so that the world will see who Christ is.

Paul then goes on to explain to the Corinthians that God had given them a ministry and a message: “[God] gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” He has appointed them to be ambassadors for Christ, God’s fellow workers; to take that message to a world filled with hopeless, helpless, dying humanity, to people living in a spiritual famine.

Stated once again, the problem is that through Adam, mankind willfully disobeyed God, became enemies of God, and as a result, broke off all of the blessings and fellowship with God. Since God is holy and just, justice had to be served. Man was placed under the wrath of God—life without God. He was sentenced to death because he did not conform to God’s standards, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In order to know how to live and have life as God intended it to be lived, and to renew our fellowship with God, we must be reconciled to God.

All Christians have been given this ministry of reconciliation. God initiated a solution to the problem of alienation by sending his Son to die on the cross for our sins. Christ’s death reconciled the world to God and made it possible for us, as sinners, to be reconciled to God. That is, his death made it possible for us to change our rebellious attitude and accept the provision God has made whereby our sins are forgiven and we are justified in Christ in the sight of God. Therefore, having received this gift, we have also now been given the ministry of reconciliation.

What an incredible God we have! What an incredible ministry and message we have! As God’s children we have a responsibility, by his power, to spread the good news. God the Father was satisfied with the

death of his Son for the sins of mankind; his righteous, holy demands have been satisfied in Christ. The door is open again. We can go home. The Father's wrath is dispelled. Reconciliation is possible for anyone God calls if by faith they accept Jesus Christ as the risen Son of God, as their Lord and Savior, as their mediator. Sin is no longer the issue, rather the issue is now Jesus! Peter says "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Not only are we given a ministry of reconciliation, but we are called to be "ambassadors for Christ." Paul says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

What is an ambassador? A United States ambassador is a personal representative of the President, representing one who cannot be personally present. We *are* (notice: present tense) ambassadors for Christ, representing One who is present but invisible. Our goal is to deliver the good news in a foreign land to all who God has called. We are recipients of the *New Covenant*. God is our God and we are his people. As we cast our lot with him and lay hold of his life, he will increasingly bestow on us his power for obedience, and his forgiveness for weakness and failure.

Finally, Paul says, "and working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." Paul is appealing to his spiritual children not to waste their lives on anything else but to fulfill their calling within God's wonderful plan of redemption. He quotes from Isaiah 49, which tells how God used Israel to be the light of salvation to the nations. Here, Paul admonishes the entire Christian community with those words. As you have received this gift of salvation and have been reconciled to God, now share that good news with others and tell them that the door is open to God through Christ.

How should we now live? We should live for others, as ambassadors for Christ. Now is the day of salvation, and all of this is possible because Christ has risen from the grave. Therefore, since now is the day of salvation, I ask you, do you want to be reconciled to Christ? If that is your desire, I plead with you, pray this prayer by faith:

- 1) Thank the Lord that he loves you.
- 2) Repent of your sins. That is, repent of the sin of rejecting Jesus as God's Son, the Messiah, his Deliverer, his Savior; the sin of rejecting the truth that you need a Savior; the sin of rejecting the gift of salvation; and, the sin of rebelling against God by trying to live your life without Jesus. Tell God you are sorry; that you didn't understand his great work and plan of salvation.
- 3) Acknowledge your need of a Savior—One who can deliver you from the power of sin; One who can deliver you from a living death; One who will forgive all of your sins, even the ones you never told anyone about; and, One who will wash away the guilt and shame that comes with those sins.
- 4) Ask the resurrected Jesus Christ, the Savior, to come into your life as Lord, to save you and impart his life to you right now.
- 5) Thank Jesus for coming into your life and for giving you the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you have prayed that prayer in faith, you will now experience the life that only the resurrected Jesus Christ can give: it is the life of God, and it's yours, forever!

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