

How Should We Now Live?

by Ron R. Ritchie

A few months ago my wife and I were invited to the home of a friend in another city. When we arrived we were introduced to a man with whom I immediately felt a kindred spirit. As the evening passed we talked about things that were happening in our lives. 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 and visit him at his home if we had time before we left the next day.

Before we caught our plane next morning we drove by his home with some friends. It is 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. He pointed out that the ceiling beams and the gates were hand-carved. In the midst of what he called this 'obsession,' his wife said to him late last year, 'You are a bore.' Then she walked out on him, leaving him with his 'Waterloo.'

We felt such compassion for him. He had lost his way. 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 intend'd to be lived, by Christ's resurrection power. I did write that letter, and shortly afterwards I got a call to say he had been rushed to surgery for a bypass operation. I called him in the hospital and asked him to read the letter. 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 your 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. First, he told them,

1. Live no longer for ourselves 5:11 -15

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, SO that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Paul begins, 'Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord...' Earlier in verse 10 he had said that one of the motivating factors of his life and ministry was the daily realization he had 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 on occasion he would not know what his motives were, he could not be sure of them until the time when he and the Lord reviewed the 'video tape' of his life as a Christian, in a time of evaluation (I Cor. 3:12-15), encouragement (1 Cor. 4:3-5), and rewards (2 Cor.4: 17).

A second motivating factor for the apostle was the 'fear of the Lord.' This is not the kind of fear a whipped

dog feels. No, 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. 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 could not be silenced.

Nor could any of the apostles be silenced following Pentecost. For example, 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 say, first thing in the morning, 'I'm just going to work,' but God may have vastly different plans for your day. Let's see what Peter said to the supreme court, the same court that had condemned Jesus a few weeks earlier. Peter found himself standing on the very same stones where Jesus had stood.

They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name do you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and everyone else in Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you completely healed. He is "The stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. " Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to 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 what motivated Paul_the judgment seat of Christ and the fear of Christ.

'What we are is plain to God,' Paul continues. 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. (See 2 Cor. 3:1-3) But Paul resolved to live in a transparent way before God and man and allow the accusations to fall where they may. He would not be set aside from his goal.

Here he gives the third reason he was motivated to serve Christ: 'Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all.' The love of Jesus guarded him, controlled him, pushed him out. He was at all times 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 choose 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, the statement is made, 'We are all gods and wemight as well get good at it.' Man is still reaching for the fruit from that tree. Romans 5 says, 'Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned' (12). 'Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men' (18).

Here is the result of the love of Christ, the good news: You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless [when we were dead in our sin, with no way out] Christ died for the ungodly...God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' (Rom. 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. It is obvious that when one dies the power of sin has been broken, for sin cannot tempt one who is dead. That is what Paul means when he says 'The love of Christ compels us because we are convinced that one died for all.'

Continuing, the apostle says, 'And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.' 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.' Those who believe in him will have life forever, life as God intended it to be lived. 'God is not wishing that any should perish, but for all to come to repentance.' (2 Pet. 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 to 'confess with their mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead.'

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 and 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 as he has, the life of God. That's why Christians are so excited at Easter. They have already tasted the hope of eternal life. That taste is but a down payment as yet, but that 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.' (I Peter 1 :3)

Not only do believers have a new life in Christ, but by the power of the resurrected Lord they discover a new motive for living. Paul says, '... that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.'

Their lives become Christ-centered instead of self-centered. At the Sunrise Service this Easter morning I had the joy of watching one of my new friends share 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? That relationship which we have with God changes everything for us. God loves to challenge us to think through what we're doing since our life, our time or our money is no longer our own. 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. How should we now live? First, we are to live no longer for ourselves; and secondly,

2. Live as Ambassadors for Christ 5:16-6:2

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who

reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says,

'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

First, Paul says, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. 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, looks, dress_free from placing people in boxes and then stamping them as approved or disapproved. He sets you free to see that they are valuable and worthy to hear the good news of Jesus.

In a store last week I saw a giant of a 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. 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, he didn't act or dress like me. In reality he was a threat to me and I don't like to be around people who threaten me. I want everyone to look like me and dress like me. I want to feel safe. But Paul would say that as Christians now we would have to regard such a man as saveable, look upon him with the compassion of Jesus and seek an opportunity to tell him the good news. It was sad to see how insecure this man was. I so wanted to have an opportunity to talk with him once I got over my own feelings and was set free by the Holy Spirit to be available.

Paul seems to indicate that he became a Christian he himself 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. But now that he has new eyes and a new heart he saw Jesus as he truly was, as Messiah and King.

Paul continues, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' Not only are believers given new eyes, but they are given new minds to understand what God is doing in their own lives and in the lives of believers around them. When Jesus became their Lord and Savior they were spiritually born again. They became new children in God, babes in Christ. When you were born again the old 'you' died. There was no power unless you chose to resurrect it. The new 'you' had arrived. The new self, the inner man, the spiritual man is alive and pulsating with eternal life and is in the process of becoming like Christ.

But everyone is in different stages of growth. Don't judge, because God is at work. We are filled with hope because we know that he will finish the work which he began in us. We are sometimes in a hurry with each other, aren't we? We love to see people come to know Jesus, but at the same time we want God to hurry up and mature them so we can get along with them better. But we are all on a different time schedule. We need to be very patient with each other as God is patient with us. They too desire to live just like we do, to be conformed to the image of Christ. 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. We all start out as brand new creatures in Christ, beginning a process of being conformed to his very image, all because Jesus arose from the dead. We are so rich, so blessed. We should be so grateful for what God is doing. Paul wrote, 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.'

Paul goes on to explain to the Corinthians that God had given him and them a ministry and a message. He had 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. 'We have the ministry of reconciliation,' Paul says. 'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.'

Stated once again, the problem is that mankind in Adam deliberately, willfully disobeyed God, became enemies of God, and as ungodly sinners broke off the blessings and fellowship of 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 fallen short of the grace of God.' So the need is, in order to know how to live and have life as God intended it to be lived, to renew fellowship with God, man must be reconciled to God, have a bridge built between himself and God.

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 you and me as individual 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. Our responsibility as Christians is that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. Our message is that 'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.'

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. God's 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 each individual God calls if by faith they accept Jesus Christ the risen Son of God as their Lord and Savior, as their mediator, as their bridge. That is good news. Sin is not the issue. The issue rather is Jesus Christ. Peter says 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'

Not only are we given a ministry of reconciliation, but Paul calls us to be 'ambassadors for Christ.' 'We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' A United States ambassador is a personal representative of the President, representing one who is not personally present. We are (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 whom God has called, telling them that God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them. If they believe the good news and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior they are placed in Christ and become the righteousness of God. They become, in Christ, all that God requires a person to be, all they could never be in themselves. Christians have come full circle. Because of the love of God, the love of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ we who were once enemies of God and sinners are now in Christ by faith. 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, we are 'God's fellow workers.' 'We urge you [Corinthians] not to receive God's grace in vain.' Paul is appealing to his spiritual children to not waste their lives on anything else but to fulfill their calling within God's wonderful plan of redemption. God loves us, and the proof of that love is the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ and also the changed life we experience. The apostle quotes a verse from Isaiah 49, showing how God used Israel to be the light of salvation to the nations. Paul admonishes the Christian community in the same 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 no longer live for ourselves; and we should live as ambassadors for Christ. Our message is all good news. Now is the day of salvation, and all 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 by faith pray this prayer:

- 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, his Messiah, his Deliverer, his Savior; the sin of rejecting the truth that you need a Savior; the sin of rejecting the gift of salvation; the sin of rebelling against God by trying to live your life with--our Jesus. Tell God you are sorry for that, that you didn't understand his great work and plan of salvation
- 3) Acknowledge your need of a Savior, One who could deliver you from the power of sin; One who could deliver you from a living death; One who would forgive all your sins, every one of them, even the ones you never told anyone about; 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!

Catalog No.
2 Cor. 4:16-5:10
Sixth message
Ron R. Ritchie
April 7, 1985

[Back to Index Page](#)

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