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THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

– JUNE 18. – COL. 3:1-15. –

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts."

FOLLOWING our consideration of our Lord's death and resurrection, it is appropriate that we apply to ourselves the two-fold lesson therein taught: –

(1) The lesson of man's depravity through the fall and his consequent need of a redemption and restitution. As we have seen, the death of Christ was man's ransom-price, and the resurrection of Christ was God's attestation of the acceptableness of the sin-offering, and preparing of the way for the blessing of mankind by raising up to superhuman life, divine glory and power, the Redeemer, – constituting him "Lord of all," and thus fitting him for the great work of blessing Adam and his family in due time – after the establishment of his Millennial Kingdom.

(2) We should note God's purpose to select from mankind a "little flock" on whom to confer Kingdom power in due time, making them his representatives and agents in the work of blessing the world of mankind with all the favors secured by the ransom sacrifice. The Scriptures show us that this plan or purpose of God was foreknown, forearranged, by him before the foundation of the world. They show us also that in the divine purpose our Lord Jesus was the Head, the First, the principal One, the Lord of this little flock, and that God's dealings with him and the method by which he was prepared for his present high position were an illustration of the method by which his Church is to be prepared for joint-heirship with him in his [R2479 : page 138] Kingdom. – Eph. 1:3,4, 4:15; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:20.

It is with this latter feature or lesson that we now have to do. In the Scripture under consideration the Apostle is addressing, nor

mankind in general, – not even believers in general, – but a specific class, namely, "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ." (Col. 1:2.) He is addressing, therefore, those who have taken the two steps of grace: – (1) The step of justification from Adamic sin and death to reconciliation with the Father through faith in the atonement accomplished by his dear Son. (2) Having thus been justified reckonedly, or by faith, lifted out of the condition of sin and condemnation, these, according to the Lords; invitation, have *consecrated* themselves in the fullest sense and degree to the Lord for obedience and service "even unto death."

This full consecration of every talent and power and opportunity is Scripturally called death – because the will has died, self-will has gone, and the Lord's will has been accepted in its stead. And since the will is the real *ego*, the real person, the thought is that the old *ego*, will or person has died, and that the new creature, having no will of his own, but being wholly under subjection to the divine will as expressed in Christ, who is the Head of this body, has come into control. Let us not lose the thought-picture here conveyed. We are not new individuals or persons, for it was individually and personally that we ceased to be when we gave ourselves over by full consecration to the Lord: our new condition is that of members or parts of the larger corporation or body of which our Lord Jesus is the Head. Whoever has a will of his own is properly to be considered an *individual*; but whoever has dropped his own will, and accepted instead of it the will of another, has ceased or figuratively has died as an individual. And this is the picture which the Apostle presents in this and in various other presentations of this subject. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 12 the same writer declares that the entire Christ is not in the members but in the Head. To whatever extent, then, the Lord's people have fully consecrated themselves to him as *members* of the body of Christ, they should be in absolute subjection to the will of God in Christ; and so far as their own wills are concerned they should have none, but in that respect should be "dead."

This is the Apostle's thought in this lesson; but he carries it further, saying that as our own wills, ambitions, aims and hopes were consecrated and reckoned dead, so we should reckon ourselves as members of the Christ, risen from the dead: new creatures, possessed and controlled by the new will, the mind of Christ. It is this class that the Apostle addresses, and from this standpoint that he declares, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."

The thought is that all of this class have, as justified earthly beings, desiring and hoping to attain jointheirship with Christ in his Kingdom, been taught of God and inspired by the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word to come to this position of self-consecration. We are to note *how* our Lord Jesus laid down his earthly life, and was by the Father exalted to a heavenly condition and the right hand of power, – as a criterion for our course as followers in his footsteps. We are to remember continually that jointheirship with the Lord in that spiritual condition and in his heavenly power and Kingdom are the hopes set before the Church of this age, and we are to "*seek* those things" – "*seek*" chiefly the Kingdom of God" – *seek* to make our calling and election sure to participation with our Lord in the Kingdom honors and glories to which he already has attained as a reward for his faithful sacrifice. – Verse 1; Matt. 6:33; Rom. 2:7; 2 Pet. 1:10.

The Apostle wishes us to understand how we are to "*seek*" those things. We are not merely to seek them in prayer, altho prayer is an excellent aid in the seeking. We are to seek them by setting our affections on those things, and by lifting our affections from earthly things.

Comparatively few realize to what extent we have the forming of our own characters – to what extent our minds, our affections, are gardens, in which we may plant either the thorns and thistles of sin, or plant the merely moral and practical qualities corresponding to the

useful vegetables, or plant those seeds which will produce the fragrant and beautiful flowers which more particularly would represent the heavenly and spiritual graces. That which a man soweth he shall also reap in kind, whether he sow to the flesh or to the spirit. Whoever, therefore, seeks for the heavenly things, joint-heirship in the Kingdom etc., Must plant or set out in his mind, in his affections, those qualities and grace which the Lord marks out as essential to the development of characters such as will be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." – Col. 1:12.

Thus the Lord throws upon all those whom he calls to this "high calling," this "heavenly calling," and who accept the call and covenant thereunder, the responsibility of their success or failure in attaining it. Through his Word he tells of their own natural weaknesses and imperfections, and shows them how he has provided a full off-set or counterbalance for these imperfections in the merit and sacrifice of the Redeemer: he shows them also what are the fruits and **[R2480 : page 139]** graces of the spirit which they must possess, in heart at least, if they would be joint-heirs with Christ: he shows them also in the Redeemer's life as well as in his teachings the copy which all must follow who would reach the same glorious station and be his joint-heirs. We might look at this matter merely from the standpoint of the responsibility which it throws upon us, and might well feel over-awed thereby; rather, however, we should view it from the standpoint of divine grace, and consider what a blessed privilege has been granted us, not only of being transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we might come more and more to know and to strive for the good, acceptable and perfect will of God, but in addition to all this God has set before us the grandest reward imaginable for the doing of that which is merely our duty and reasonable service – the doing of that which would bring us the largest measure of joy and peace, aside from a future reward. – 2 Pet. 1:3,4.

There is a natural attraction to earthly things for all mankind: even tho the earthly things, during the reign of evil, be blemished and

in many respects distasteful to those who have learned to love righteousness and hate iniquity, there is nevertheless still a strong attraction to the marred and blemished earthly things. Like weeds, earthly affections and desires spring spontaneously from seeds which come we know not whither. The Christian, therefore, who would keep his heart in the love of God must not only keep planting out or setting his affections on heavenly things, but he must keep rooting out the weeds of earthly desire and attraction.

As the Apostle intimates, our new life is not manifest to all, nor upon all occasions; it is a life of new desire, new aims, new aspirations, – which the world can neither see nor fully appreciate, tho it see some outward manifestations of the new life in our daily conduct. Even the "brethren" may not be able to appreciate the progress of the new life in us; and even ourselves may at times be somewhat perplexed respecting the rapidity and strength of its growth, and we may need to look back over weeks or months, or perhaps years, in order to determine unquestionably that it is growing. Our new life, represented by our endeavors to follow the new will of Christ, is *hidden* thus in Christ and in the Father.

It is in harmony with this thought that the Apostle Paul declared in one place that neither the world nor the brethren were capable of judging him – that only the Lord, who could read the heart and know all the conditions and testings and weaknesses to be striven against, could properly judge him. He even declares, "Yea, I judge not mine own self." (Rom. 14:4; 1 Cor. 4:3; Jas. 4:12.) It is an excellent plan neither to condemn others who claim to be walking conscientiously as children of the Lord, nor even to condemn ourselves under similar circumstances. We should simply press along day by day, doing the best we can to cultivate the heavenly graces and to serve our Master, leaving all the results with the Lord. He careth for us, and so long as our hopes and aims and objects of life are centered in the heavenly things, and our lives thus hid with Christ in God, we need fear no evil, present or future. For the Lord, will be with us and bless us and

keep us from falling and ultimately present us blameless. – Psa. 23:4; Jude 24; Col. 1:22.

This condition of things is to last throughout the entire Gospel age, and is to apply to all the members of the body of Christ. All are to be dead to the world and all are to have their ambitions and hopes for life hidden with Christ in God. As the Father has done for our Lord, so he will do for all those who are truly united to him; and the time for bringing these blessings to the Church is, the Apostle states, at the second coming of the Lord. Then the Lord's people will no longer be misunderstood by each other nor by the world; then the faithful will all appear with the master in glory, and then will begin the work of blessing all the families of the earth with a knowledge of the truth and with an opportunity for full restitution to all that was lost in Adam.

Having thus set forth the proper course of the Church in the line of aspirations, hopes, etc., the Apostle turns to the other side of the question, and gives us particular and explicit directions *how* we should proceed to carry out our consecration vow of deadness to earthly things and life only toward the heavenly things. It will be noticed that he does not counsel retirement from the world and its busy cares to cloisters, monasteries or nunneries, but taking the Lord's consecrated people where they may be, he advises respecting the methods by which they can best accomplish the desired results of mortifying of *deadening* their appetites, desires, etc., which are rooted and grounded in their fallen flesh or earthly nature. He mentions these besetments, commencing with the more gross and ending with the most subtle.

Fornication was very prevalent in the Apostle's day, and he would have the saints recognize this gross, prominent evil, and then in connection with it notice others which they might be much more likely to overlook. First of these in order is "uncleanness." What a searching thought is in that word! It means anything that is not pure,

not chaste, not holy not clean. If a good many of the saints might feel that it was useless to mention to them so gross an evil as fornication, they would be forced to admit that in their imperfect condition they required guarding, counseling, [R2480 : page 140] on the score of "uncleanness." This reminds us of our Lord's words to the disciples on the night before his crucifixion. He said to Peter, when proposing to wash his feet, "Ye are clean, but not all." So the saints consecrated to the Lord are clean of heart, pure of heart; yet they are not all clean – the members which touch the earth, their sensibilities and passions which come in contact with the defiled human nature, need cleansing, need "washing with water through the Word." All filth, all uncleanness, every "spot and wrinkle," needs attention, and the "precious blood: is the antidote for every stain. – Eph. 5:25-27.

"Inordinate affection" is one of the things mentioned as needing attention and correction by the saints: this signifies earthly or animal passions. The saints are to mortify these, that is, to deaden them – not only to seek not to cultivate, not to enliven, not to arouse, such passions either in themselves or in others, but on the contrary they are to seek to deaden these as well as to cultivate the higher and nobler joys and sentiments. The deadening or mortifying of these, and the self-denial according to the flesh thus implied, is a part of the antitypical *fasting* in which all of the Lord's people should seek to engage, each according to his zeal, opportunities and possibilities.

"Evil concupiscence" (or, in more modern language, *desires for forbidden things*) is a step higher in the Apostle's list of evil tendencies that should be rooted out and mortified, *deadened*. It is not sufficient that we acknowledge sin in its various forms to be evil, and that we resolve that we will strive against it because it is under the Lord's ban: in addition to this we are to root out of our hearts every *longing*, every *desire* for every thing not thoroughly approved by the Lord. Oh, what a cleansing this would mean in the hearts and lives, and especially in the thoughts, of many who have named the name of Christ! Many who fail to note this point, who fail to follow

the Apostle's admonition, find themselves continually beset by temptations, because, while outwardly avoiding gross immoralities, they secretly harbor sympathies for things condemned, – *desiring* that they might have them, if only they were not forbidden. Under such conditions comparatively little progress can be made in the higher life. The Apostle would set before us the proper course to be pursued, if we would win the great prize, – namely, the high standard of bringing the very thoughts, wishes, desire, of our hearts into full conformity to the perfect will of God: and only those who do so are properly making progress, running the race set before us in the Gospel. – 2 Cor. 10:5.

The Apostle concludes his list of things against which the "new creature" must war to the *death* by naming *covetousness*, and declaring it a species of idolatry. In other words, if the hearts of the Lord's people are running after any earthly thing (even if it be not an evil thing of itself), if they are centering their affections upon even good things of an earthly kind, and are neglecting to set their affections upon the heavenly things, they are failing to run the race successfully. This is amongst the most seductive trials of the Lord's people. Some will set their affections upon a wife or a husband, or upon parents or children, or upon a good name before the public, to such an extent that when testings come as to whether or not they love these more than they love the Lord, their conduct proves that they have given to these *earthly good things* a degree of love beyond that they accorded to the Lord.

Frequently the Lord's people do not at the time realize that this is the case. They love the Lord, and they love their families and friends, and a good name, which is to be preferred to great riches; and they do not realize that they love the Lord less than they love these other things. The Lord, however, will test everyone whom he will receive to the high calling along just these lines; he declares in advance that whoever loves father, mother, children or any other thing more than him is not worthy of him – not worthy to be counted

as a member of the body of the Christ in glory, – the overcoming Church. The overcomers must all be proven to be such as would sacrifice every other thing for the Lord; such as would sacrifice the love and fellowship and approval, if necessary, of every other being, in order to retain the love and favor of the Lord. We believe that this test is coming daily closer and closer to the Lord's consecrated people, and it behooves everyone of us to remember that this is one of the elements of our trial, and to set our affections on the heavenly things accordingly, and to mortify or deaden all such affections toward earthly beings and things as would bring these into competition with our **[R2481 : page 140]** Lord in our affections, service. etc.

The Apostle sums up this list of evils to be deadened by saying that it is in the seeking of these earthly things, because of such things growing in their hearts, that the Lord's wrath is to come "on the children of disobedience." Who are these children of disobedience? Are they the wicked, the worldly, the unregenerate? No, none of these; for they are not "children" at all. The reference evidently is to those who have become children of God by his legitimate arrangement of (1) justification and (2) sanctification through faith in Christ. He is referring to those who are of the class "called to be saints," but who fail to make sure their calling and election to jointheirship with the Lord, as members of the kingdom "little flock." He refers to those who do not properly set their affections **[R2481 : page 141]** on heavenly things, but allow their affections to centre chiefly in earthly things. He refers to the "great company" who, because of loving father or mother, houses or lands, or something else, to such an extent that they fail to keep their covenant of sacrifice, will be accounted unworthy of a share in the Kingdom, and instead will be subjected to the great time of trouble – "the day of wrath." – 1 Cor. 3:15; Rev. 7:9-15.

This does not signify, however, that such persons have become exceedingly corrupt in their lives, but merely that they are continuing

in the course of life in which they were before making their covenant to the Lord. This is clearly expressed in the seventh verse of our lesson.

Coming down to a *particularization* of the change which should take place in those who have consecrated themselves wholly to the Lord, the Apostle enumerates certain alterations of disposition which should be attempted, and, so far as possible, accomplished; namely, the putting away of all the following – anger, wrath, malice, evil-speaking, impurity of language, and falsehood in its every form. At first thought such correction of life might seem to be unnecessary to mention as being too coarse and entirely opposed to every true Christian principle; but as we scrutinize the matter we find that the Apostle has really taken into his list nearly all the weaknesses of the flesh which beset those who have become "new creature in Christ." What is more common with Christian people than to become angry? How many there are who have named the name of Christ who have malicious or at least unkind thoughts respecting others, and who harbor these, and sometimes permit them to influence their conduct! How many there are who indulge in evil speaking, that is, slander (here translated "blasphemy")! This is often done in such a manner as not only to deceive the hearer, but also to deceive the speaker as respects his real intention in speaking of others discredibly, unkindly.

What a wonderful world this would be if all the evil or impure language were avoided! Every Christian should see to it that henceforth every word which proceeds from his mouth shall be such as will minister grace to the hearers – such words as will only good and be edifying. Finally, how much need there is, not only of having good intentions in the heart, but also of expressing those good intentions truthfully one to another – without deception, without hypocrisy. But it requires that a heart be very pure and very full of love if it would be very truthful, otherwise it would lead into trouble continually. If the unloving, ungenerous, unkind hearts, full of evil

surmising, malice, hatred and strife, were to express themselves frankly it would add immensely to the trouble of the world. The Apostle therefore urges first, the purifying of the heart, and then general candor.

These corrections of life are urged as the reasonable and proper outcome of our transformation from the Adamic and fallen nature, reckoned dead, to the new nature of Christ, of whose "body" we have become reckonedly members, controlled and renewed in knowledge through our new Head, Christ Jesus.

And the Apostle then shows that in this new condition, as members of the body of Christ, we are to remember that previous differences of man are ignored, for whoever is accepted of the Lord as a member of his body is a fellow-member with every other member thus accepted, – whether, according to the flesh, they were Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian, bondman or freeman; because all who come into Christ are reckoned *dead* to their previous condition, and alive to the new conditions which are life for all. Thus, a slave being set free is dead to his former slavery, and may figuratively be said to have started on a new life. Thus also a citizen may renounce his allegiance to the land of his birth and may swear allegiance to another country, and become a citizen of it, and thus be reckoned as dead to the nation of which he was a citizen by birth, and to have become alive as a citizen of the new nation to which he has been adopted. Thus it is with all those who re in Christ: they may have been Welshman or Spaniards, Britons or Gauls, blacks or whites, Indians or Malays, but as soon as they are accepted of the Lord as new creature through faith and consecration they are to reckon themselves *dead* to all their former relationships and obligations, and as having come into new conditions as citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom, and reckonedly heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

This does not mean, however, that the white man will become a black man, nor the black man a white man; it does not mean, necessarily, a change of language either, nor a revolution in all the tastes and peculiarities wherewith one was born; nor does it mean a full release, according to the flesh, from obligations to the land of our birth, nor imply that we should not be subject to the powers that be, except as their demands might conflict with the positive commands of our King; nor does it imply an ignoring of the differences of sex and the proprieties which belong to each sex, and which, according to the Scriptures, are to be continued and preserved during this age. It does imply, however, that in thinking of each other as *new creatures* in Christ Jesus. All are to be considered as on a common plane or level – none are to be disesteemed as "brethren" because of color, speech or sex.

With this thought before our minds, – of the oneness [R2481 : page 142] and equality of those who have been accepted into the body of Christ, the Apostle urges upon our attention the necessity, not only of putting off the evil dispositions of our fallen flesh, but the necessity also of putting on, cultivating, the various graces of the Spirit exemplified in our Head, Christ Jesus. He specifies these: (1) Bowels of mercies, or, in more modern language, *compassionate sentiments*; a disposition toward largeness and generosity of heart toward everybody and everything – toward the saints, toward our neighbors and friends and relatives, toward our enemies, and toward the brute creation. Amplifying, he continues, showing that it would imply (2) kindness toward all; (3) humbleness of mind, the reverse of boastfulness, headiness, arrogance; (4) meekness, or gentleness of disposition; (5) long-suffering, or patient endurance with the faults and weaknesses of others. It implies that we should bear with each other's peculiarities of temperament and disposition, freely forgiving one another, if there be cause of offence found in each other – learning the meanwhile to correct ourselves, as we see our own blemishes more or less mirrored in others. And the standard for all this course of conduct is found in

the Lord's course toward us, for he surely has been generous, kind, forbearing and forgiving.

The Apostle wishes us to notice that he is not attempting a reformation of the world along these lines, but merely a transformation of those who have entered into a special covenant with the Lord, namely, the Church: "the elect of God, holy and beloved." Nevertheless, all who are thus covenanted to the Lord, and hope to make their calling and election sure to membership in the glorified Church, will not only seek to have these fruits of the spirit in their own lives, but will seek also to cultivate the same as they may have opportunity in their friends and neighbors: above all will such seek to exercise such a good influence upon their own families – that as their children receive from them, as parents, the natural life and the necessary instructions and start therein, they may also if possible receive from them their start in the new life, and the necessary instructions and equipment for the same.

But the Apostle, as the mouthpiece of the holy Spirit, is a thorough instructor: not only does he tell us what *dis-graces* to put off and what *graces* to put on, but viewing the Lord's body arrayed in these glorious qualities of heart, – compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patient endurance, forbearance and forgiveness, -he adds, "And *above* all these put on love, which is the bond of perfectness." Love is thus pictured as the "girdle" which binds and holds in place the folds of the robe of Christ's righteousness, with its various graces. In other words, the Apostle would have us see that forbearance, meekness, patience, etc., must not be matters of courtesy merely, or matters of policy merely, but however much they might partake of these qualities at the beginning, the wearers will not be perfected in heart, not be fit of the kingdom, until they have reached the place where these various graces of their wills, or intentions, are bound to them by the cords of love – love for the Lord, love for righteousness, love for the "brethren," and sympathetic love for the whole groaning

creation. Love is indeed the bond of perfectness, the very spirit of the Lord.

How forceful in its place is the last verse of this lesson, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body [one corporation, one Church – the body of Christ], and be ye thankful." Not until God's people have reached some measure of what the Apostle has here outlined can they know experimentally the blessedness of having divine peace *rule* in their hearts and lives, controlling their relationship with every member of the body of Christ under the bond of love, and producing more and more in them the spirit of gratitude and thankfulness to God, for mercies and blessings enjoyed. And such gratitude will find its natural and proper outlet in endeavors to serve the Lord: endeavors which the Lord will be sure to accept from such hearts, reckoned holy and acceptable through Christ Jesus, the head and Redeemer.
