

CALLED TO NEW LIFE

The GREAT EXPECTATION of anyone in the world that has ever heard the Gospel message is that those people who have accepted the claim that Jesus is Lord ought to be different from the rest of the world. When that expectation is not fulfilled, then the world tends to think that there is nothing to this business of Christianity--that it really doesn't matter. On the other hand, when the unsaved sees a professing Christian living a life that is different and on a higher plane, then the truth of the Gospel is validated in his mind.

When we become Christians; that is, when we are born of the spirit, we have tremendous potential. However, this potential must be developed in much the same way a new born baby grows and develops. We cannot expect a healthy spiritual life if we never take any spiritual food. We cannot expect any growth of our faith if we never venture out to give God a chance to meet our needs. God has provided His Holy Spirit to help us fulfill our potential; however, it takes our cooperation for the help and ability that He provides to be effective. In Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus he indicates that we must take some action in this development process.

EPHESIANS 4:22-24 Paul has just warned the Christians at Ephesus to be on their guard against slipping back into the old life. He characterized the unsaved as walking in the "vanity of the mind." So much of what we concern ourselves with and spend so much time thinking about really is of little consequence in the perspective of eternity. The Christian has the power to be different; however, we need to take some action. We have a choice of what we think about and the perspective with which we view life's situations. Paul likened it to taking off an old dirty garment and exchanging it for a new, fresh clean one. If you had been out fishing for a couple of days and had not had a bath you would feel and smell grimy. Say that you come home and take a nice warm bath and get cleaned up and then put on the dirty fishing clothes. That would not make a lot of sense, would it. Same way for a Christian. When we have been born again and washed in the blood of the Lamb we should not then conduct ourselves the same way we did before that event. It would be like putting on the old dirty, smelly fishing clothes.

We really must change the way we think--let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. We are to view life from Christ's perspective of love and compassion and generosity. We are talking about making Christ Lord of our thoughts. The process takes time and it takes discipline. As we follow through on bringing our thoughts in line with the will of God, then our actions will change and people will be able to see a difference.

EPHESIANS 4:25-29 Paul got very specific in this passage as to some examples of what is characteristic of the old life and what is characteristic of the new life.

PUT OFF: speaking lies, constant anger, welcome mat out for the devil, stealing to get needs met, foul language that hurts

PUT ON: speak the truth, settle it early, give no place for the devil, working to satisfy needs and help others, words that build up.

Many people lie and seemingly cannot help it. They try to make themselves appear better than

they are. They imagine what they wish they had said and then tell it for the truth. Liars of this sort have a poor self image and they are attempting to make it better. When we are operating out of humility, then we have our need for importance satisfied in the relationship we have to our Heavenly Father.

Some people have difficulty controlling the emotion of anger. They will get into a rage over the slightest thing. This lack of control is destructive and destroys relationships. There are things that should make us angry and we should be motivated to bring about a correction of those things that should be changed.

We need to be constantly on guard against the devil getting a foothold in our lives. If we participate in sinful activities, then we are doing just that. Uncontrolled anger, greed that leads to stealing, impure thought that results in foul language are all danger points.

EPHESIANS 4:30-32 God has sent His Spirit to dwell in us. If we participate in things that are less than holy and righteous, if we behave ourselves in a manner that is not in keeping with the character of Christ, then we create an environment that is non- welcoming to the Holy Spirit. When we became the children of God, then we entered into a special relationship with God. Just as you would be disappointed and grieve over your own children when they do improper things, in like manner our Heavenly Father is disappointed when we behave or think improperly. Paul listed the kinds of things that many Christians condone in their lives that really should not be there. Just as our spiritual growth is progressive, so is sin. Bitterness (a feeling of resentment) can grow into indignation from which a person can become "worked up". If this is unchecked it will result in an outcry (uncontrolled comment) and will eventually lead to slander of another person. Christians who would never bow down to an idol or murder, or steal, or commit adultery are likely to find themselves being bitter toward others or even toward God. Paul tells us that such is displeasing to God and grieves the Holy Spirit. He also tells us what pleases God: being kind and having a heart of compassion, being willing to forgive those that have hurt us in the same way that God forgave us.

EPHESIANS 5:1-4 Have you ever noticed how a child will pick up the actions of his parents. We are to be picking up the actions and characteristics of our Heavenly Father. Jesus gave us the perfect example of what walking in love is all about. It involves sacrifice of self and our own desires, it involves put the old nature to death so that the new life can flourish and grow. Many things that are common in the world are not to be a part of this new life.

EPHESIANS 5:18-20 The world tries to find fulfillment in the things of the world. With some, they may seek help in alcohol so that they can deal with their problems. This approach does not work and only leads to more problems. The alternative is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and thus deal constructively with life's problems and to put them in proper perspective. Our response to God will be overflowing with thanksgiving and praise as we realize how much He loves us and has done for us in Christ Jesus.