

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for February 26: Jesus as the focus of life

February 14, 2012

Russian dictator Joseph Stalin once collapsed before his parliament, and some—believing he was dead—began to shout and rejoice. Stalin, however, was far from dead, and those who rejoiced paid with their lives.

There's an analogy here we can use in reference to the Christian life. We're born into a sinful fleshly body, a body controlled by the world, the devil and its own lusts (Ephesians 2:1-3; James 1:14). Then, one day, we come to Jesus for salvation. I'm sure you remember the glory of that moment, the joy and incredible feeling. I'm sure it felt as if all the old, sinful ways were gone forever, and your world was brand new. It probably felt so good your heart rejoiced.

However, it probably wasn't long until it began to dawn on you that the old nature still was active. You just thought Satan was dead in your life, but here he was rearing his ugly head again. You may have found yourself being drawn back to some of your old ways and to the realization that the battle against evil was far from over. The truth is, it was just beginning. But now the struggle going on inside you was spiritual (Galatians 5:17).

This is the struggle the Apostle Paul wrote about in Colossians 3, and he gives us some ammunition with which to fight the battle. Some principles are laid out that, if followed, will help us live the right kind of life before God and the world. Paul tells us how to gain victory over our old life.

First of all, we are changed to a new way of life when we become a Christian. We exchange earthly desires and affections for new heavenly

desires and affections. It's a 180-degree turn from the direction we were going.

Our mindset is forever changed. We were on Satan's team, and now we're on God's team. Our heart is set on things that glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). We're suddenly motivated by the heavenly instead of the earthly.

When we came to Jesus for salvation, we died to our old self. Our death to the old actually was a heavenly deliverance. When Jesus died on the cross, we died in him (Romans 6:6). We were liberated from sin and no longer are slaves to it (Romans 6:7).

Although our old nature died in the mind of God, it's still very much alive in us today. We still have to live with it every day, so it's not a contradiction to say it's dead even while it lives.

Our new life in Christ challenges us to get negative about some old things hanging around in our life. Sometimes a negative response to something is the only valid one. That's why you remove a ruptured appendix. You extract a broken tooth. You weed a garden. God is saying certain parts of us need to be put to death, and we've been elected to do the killing.

Paul names the activities that need to be put to death—and he assigns them to two groups.

The first sin group is the sensual sins. They include fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection or depraved passions, evil concupiscence and covetousness.

The second sin group Paul mentions is the social sins. They include anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communications and lying.

There are certain characteristics of new life in Christ—evidences of salvation. We are, obviously, characterized by new deeds we wouldn't have

considered in our old life. We experience change that can be seen and felt. New deeds are reflected in the way we live.

First, there's the fruit of the Spirit. Our new life, which is energized and led by God, always will manifest the proof of the Spirit's presence (Galatians 5:19-25).

Second, there's forgiveness of the saints. When Christ reigns in our heart, there's no room for grudges or grievances; there's only room for forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-5).

Third, there's the fragrance of the Savior. When we walk in the newness of life, we have the fragrance of Christ in our lives—and that fragrance is love (John 13:35). A life controlled by the Lord is a life of love.

Fourth, there's the fullness of the spiritual life. The Spirit in fullness demonstrates himself in peace and assurance before God. Salvation, and the assurance of it, is forever settled (2 Corinthians 13:5; 2 Peter 1:10).

Fifth, a thankful Spirit also manifests itself before the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

We are not only characterized by evidences of salvation, but also by a new direction. We're no longer directed by the flesh, the world and the devil. We're now directed by the will and word of God.

There's a new dependence upon the word of God, a new declaration of the word and a new demonstration of our faith before the world. We're no longer interested in pleasing the flesh. Now our every decision is based on whether or not it brings glory to the Lord. Our life is controlled by the new God has put into it.

There was an ancient Roman custom of forcing a murderer to wear the corpse of his victim chained to him. The rotting corpse of his victim ate into

him and drained him of life. If we don't allow God to control our lives, the dead Satan attaches to us will.