

A Life of Excellence (2)

This new life that God has given to us can be described in one word, love. What kind of love does God have for us? It is the kind of love that seeks the others welfare above its own. It is a selfless love.

God's love for us is not intended to be mere words. He backs up His claims of love with real acts to show us that He really does love us.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Real love is action, not feeling

1 John 3:18

Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Scripture tells us that since God loved, God gave. This demonstrates that God does not love with mere words, but with actions. We can see God's love in action through the following verses.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- What did God do to demonstrate His love? _____
- When did He love us? ___ Only after we loved Him -or- ___ While we were sinners

1 John 3:16

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

- How do we know love? _____
- What does this verse say about loving others? _____

This last verse explains that the greatest act of love is giving one's self for others. This truly follows Jesus' example. Although He should have been the one to be served, He came to serve others and save us from eternal death.

Matthew 20:28

The Son of Man (Jesus) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many

- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to this earth? _____
- From these verses does it seem like Jesus was seeking His own comfort or security? ___Yes ___No

God's love for us will never fail. Unfortunately we cannot say the same about our love for Him. Sometimes believers make foolish choices that disrespect God and lead us towards a life that displeases Him. In these times God's love for us never changes. In fact, Jesus told a story about a disrespectful son who left his father to seek his own way and how the father dealt with this son when he came back to him.

Please take time and read *Luke 15:11-24*

- Who does the father represent in this story? _____
- Who does the disrespectful son represent in this story? _____
- What did the Father (God) do when He saw the son (you) coming back home to Him? (vs. 20) _____

Unconditional: Without limit or restrictions.

The father's love for his son was unconditional, and so is God's love for us. This leads us to a point that must be made concerning all believers in Jesus. Since God loved us, He showed us His love through actions. We as believers should love God, but how? Our love for God must go beyond mere words.

Jesus taught us that our love of God is not founded in feelings or words, but in something more measurable.

John 14:15

"If you love Me (Jesus), you will keep My commandments."

- By obeying what is written in Scripture, we show God that we _____ Him.
- By ignoring His commandments, or just not finding out what they are, what does this show to God? _____

Mark 12:30

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

- Match the definition with its corresponding description.

___ Heart	A. Thoughts
___ Soul	B. Desires
___ Mind	C. Actions
___ Strength	D. Being

Obedience to God's word is very important to Him, but this kind of life may be different to the one you are used to living. To adopt this kind of love for God by which you honor Him with your thoughts, desires, actions and everything that you are may require a great change in your life.

Remember, your life (your new life) is made possible by Him and He will help you to make changes that honor Him and benefit you. The first step in an obedient life is to honor God by follow Jesus' commandment concerning **Baptism**.

Baptism is the full immersion of our bodies into water symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is our declaration that we believe that Jesus died for our sins (this is the immersion) and rose again from the dead to offer us eternal life (this is the coming back up). More than this, Scripture declares that baptism is identifying with the new life, that the old self is dead and the new self lives to love and obey the Lord.

Romans 6:3-4

3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

- Verse 3 declares that when we are baptized, we are baptized into His death. What did we die from? _____
- As Christ was raised from the dead, so are we raised to do what? (vs. 4) _____

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Living the new life will not come naturally. We have formed habits that will be very difficult to break. So where do we begin? Our attitude, outlook and focus need to change to fit in the framework of honoring God, but first let us look to the mind.

The mind controls the rest of the body, so what we allow ourselves to think on will have dramatic impact on what we do (or don't do) for God. This may require a certain amount of "house cleaning" to rid the mind of things that dishonor God's word.

God wants us to make the wise choice to avoid those things we know we shouldn't do, and do what we know is right.

Galatians 5:16

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

- The desires of the flesh are part of which nature? ___ Old ___ New

Ephesians 4:21-23

21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

- What does verse 22 say we should do with our old self? _____
- According to verse 23 what does God want to do with our minds? _____

Just as our relationship with God has changed since we believed in Jesus, so too must our actions and our thoughts change. We are called to live a new life, a changed life that serves a higher purpose.

Ephesians 4:24

and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

- What two things is your new life created in? _____

This new life may not only require some big changes in the way you think, but also in the way you do things. Scripture gives a few examples of the changes people should make and the reasoning behind the changes.

Ephesians 4:25

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor...

- What are we to stop doing? _____
- What are we to start doing? _____

Ephesians 4:26

Do not let the sun go down on your anger...

- How long are we to wait before settling a problem? _____

Ephesians 4:28

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

- What are we to stop doing? _____
- What are we to start doing? _____

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us...

- What are we to walk in? _____
- Why are we to do this? _____

As we can plainly see, there are some things in our lives that we need to stop doing. However, this only leaves a vacuum in our behavior. So we should replace the old habits (old self) with good habits (new self) that honor God and draw us closer to being imitators of Him.

Discussion Questions

- 1. We discussed that we should do things God's way instead of doing things the way we think they should be done. Is there any benefit in doing things God's way?*
- 2. When should a person be baptized?*
- 3. Ephesians 4:21-23 talked about having our minds renewed. What do you think it means to renew your mind?*
- 4. How does someone love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength? Give practical examples.*
- 5. From our discussions on changing our lives to live in newness of life, what things do you think you may need to let go of in order to grow in your faith?*