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## Lives Worthy of the Lord

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# Lives Worthy of the Lord

STUART LOVE

*The following is a meditation presented at an Easter service at Pepperdine University.*

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.  
Colossians 1.9–10

When preparing a meditation for an Easter service, we usually turn to a passage from one of the four Gospels. Today, however, we are utilizing Paul's letter to the Colossians. Why is this? It is because Colossians itself can be regarded as an Easter meditation that celebrates the resurrected life.

As Paul compliments our sisters and brothers at Colossae on their devotion to Christ, he is concerned that they (and we) live in the present as if we are already in heaven. Paul says, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is ... for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3.1–3). Apparently, Paul's point is that *what* Christ has accomplished by his death and resurrection, has actually and completely liberated us from the powers of evil and given us access to God.

You see, in Christ, we have a new, full life that began in faith when we were baptized. Baptism for Paul in Colossians marks the beginning of a totally new way of living (2.12–13; see Rom 6.4). It can be compared to a burial and a resurrection, a burial because we have in effect died and are buried (*hidden*) not in the earth, but in God, along with Christ, where all wisdom and real knowledge lie hidden—"in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2.3). But through baptism we are also "raised" with Christ "through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (2.12). By God's grace, God our Savior has raised us up with Christ—"he has rescued us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son..." (1.13, 14).

To drive this point home *in terms of how we live* Paul compares the separation of our old and new life as the putting off of old clothes and the putting on of new ones. For example, we are not to lie to one another, because in Christ we have "stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed ourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator" (3.9–10). In the sacred, sacramental rite of baptism we died and we were raised to a radically new way of life with Christ.

How can I illustrate this? Do you remember the baptismal scene in the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Ulysses, Pete, and Delmar, the escaped prisoners from the chain gang, hear singing and see women and men clothed in white walking among the trees, making their way to the river to be baptized. Delmar, sweet dim-witted Delmar, runs into the water and joins the baptismal procession. After his baptism, Delmar rejoins Ulysses and Pete and exclaims, "...the preacher has saved me from all my sins ... the preacher's done washed away all my sins and transgressions, including the Piggly Wiggly I knocked over in Yazoo. It's the straight and narrow from here on out. Neither God nor man has anything on me now. Come on in boys, the water's fine." Paul most probably would raise an eyebrow over Delmar's ignorant bliss but the scene does remind me that in baptism we as believers die and are raised by the power of God to a new life.

My message, however, is not on baptism. My message is that the life of the resurrection emerges out of a decisive death and that as God's new creation we need not follow any other requirement, whether it be ascetic demands or a belief that human destiny is controlled by the stars. We need not add to Christ any New Age practices. We need not live in the guilt of human condemnation that insists we are not humble

enough. We need not add to Christ special practices to support the adequacy of our standing before God. We need not dwell on spiritual visions or submit to anyone's regulations—"do not handle, do not taste, do not touch." All such matters reflect the *appearance* of wisdom, a *superficial* piety, a *false* humility, and a *treatment* of our bodies in ways that really never check a life of self-indulgence. Paul calls us to something that is quite the opposite. In Christ there is "fullness" and "completeness." In Christ we have been enthroned with God in the heavenly places. In Christ we already share in the riches, treasures, and inheritance of God's kingdom.

Oh yes, we are still in movement. We still need to put to death whatever does not contribute to life. We need to rid ourselves of sexual impurity. We need to purge ourselves of wrath, anger, malice, slander, and abusive language. And the list could go on. Why is this so? It is because God has stripped away the old clothes—the old self with its practices.

Raised to the new life, we've put on new clothes. We've put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, and forgiveness. These are the clothes of the manner of life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him. Let us allow Christ's peace to rule in our hearts. Let us this day be thankful as we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. Let us this day teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, Christ's wisdom. And let us this day devote our words and deeds to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Let us this day dwell in the all sufficiency of Christ.

Let us lead lives worthy of the Lord.

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