

Four Steps to a Better Life

The shelves of the average bookstore today are full of self-help books; such as, *six steps to financial freedom*, *eight steps to better health*, *twelve steps to beat addiction*. The one thing that all these books have in common is that they seek to improve the life we have. They attempt to clean up our old life and make it better. Scripture tells us that the key to a better life is not to try to clean up our old life but to receive a new life, the life of Christ. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he gives four steps to receiving and living the life of Christ.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:18-21

This instruction to the Ephesians is paralleled in Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Colossians 3:16-19

Get a Life

The two passages above are similar in their instruction except that Ephesians gives the first step as, "be filled with the Spirit," while Colossians lists the first step as, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." These two different phrases in parallel passages teach a great truth about the working of the Spirit in the Age of Grace. The filling of the Spirit is synonymous with the indwelling of God's Word. In Scripture the filling of the Spirit is often associated with receiving and speaking the Word of God.

And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. Ezekiel 2:1,2

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by

the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. II Peter 1:20,21

Christ in His earthly ministry and Paul in his letter to the Ephesians relate the Spirit of God to the Word of God.

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. John 6:63

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Ephesians 6:17

Referring to the Word of God as the "sword of the Spirit" Paul indicates that the Spirit works through the Word. The Spirit uses the Word to fight the battle against Satan.

Believers in the Age of Grace are the first of God's people to have the completed Word of God. Paul speaks of this completion as "that which is perfect" in I Corinthians 13, and the "unity of the faith" in Ephesians 4. In *time past*, it was necessary for the Spirit to impart information to believers in a supernatural way. The written Word of God is now complete and this practice is no longer necessary. The Spirit revealed all the information for us, to and through the Bible writers.

The filling of the Spirit in the Age of Grace is not a magical, mystical, experience that hits as a "bolt out of the blue." The filling of the Spirit comes as we study the words of the Spirit found in the Scriptures. The Scriptures are our source of life.

For the word of God is quick [alive], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Since the Scriptures are alive and originated with God we conclude that the life they contain is God's life. This is the same life that was visibly manifested in the earthly ministry of Christ. The Scriptures are the objective means of access to the Life of Christ.

God's Word contains two different aspects of receiving the life of Christ.

First, believe the message of the Gospel in the Word and receive the life of Christ. Our old life in Adam is crucified and we receive new life in Christ.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

Second, study the Word of God and by faith implement it in our daily walk, and the life of Christ is exhibited in that walk.

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. I Thessalonians 2:13

Received by faith, the Word of God gives us and causes us to live the life of Christ.

The first step to a better life is to get rid of the life you have and get a new one, the life of Christ.

Talk to Yourself

Paul's next instruction concerning the Life of Christ involves music.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Ephesians 5:19

teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians 3:16b

Music was created by God as a means of proclaiming His truth, both to His people and to the world. All through Scripture the Bible writers join Paul in his admonition to teach the truth of God by setting it to music.

When Israel was delivered out of bondage in Egypt they sang a song to tell the world of this mighty miracle of God.

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Exodus 15:1-3

King David appointed musicians and singers and wrote many wonderful Psalms to use in proclaiming God's truth.

And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jeiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obbededom: and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals; Benaiah also and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God. Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren. Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. I Chronicles 16:4-9

O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. Psalms 96:1-3

O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Psalms 105:1,2

The true purpose of music is to proclaim the person and work of God. In Paul's instructions concerning music, we see how this occurs. Paul writes that we are to make "melody." In music the melody is the part of a song that carries the lyrics, or the words. Words put to a melody are easier to remember. None of us will probably ever forget, no matter how hard we try, "Plop,

fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is," or, "Look for the union label, when you are buying a shirt, dress, or blouse." These messages are forever etched in our minds because they were put to music. As you read the lines you no doubt remembered the tune that went with them. The same is true when the message of God's truth is put to music. It is easily remembered and passed on to others when set to a melody. The primary thrust of music is not the harmony or the beat but the melody. It is the melody that carries the words and conveys the message of the song.

Music serves to teach God's truth both to "yourselves" and to "one another." Singing songs of truth in our hearts reinforces that truth in our lives. As we sing aloud it serves to teach and admonish others with that truth.

Just as music is used to teach God's truth, it is also used to teach Satan's lie. God created Satan as a musical creature to lead the angels of heaven in God's praise.

Thou [Lucifer] hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Ezekiel 28:13

With Lucifer's fall, his musical ability was corrupted and is now used to glorify the creature rather than the creator.

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands. Isaiah 5:11,12

Music that does not consider and exalt the work of God's hands does not serve the purpose that God intends.

The second step to a better life is to take the truth of God's Word and sing it into your heart and mind, and the hearts and minds of others so that it becomes as unforgettable as a commercial jingle.

Be Thankful

Paul's third instruction concerning the life of Christ is to be thankful.

Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Ephesians 5:20

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Colossians 3:17

One of the primary characteristics of fallen man is that he fails to give God the thanks and glory He deserves.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Romans 1:18-23

This lack of thanksgiving began with Lucifer and his prideful boasts.

Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus [Lucifer], and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. . . . Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. . . . Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. Ezekiel 28:12,15,17

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee. Isaiah 14:12-14

Rather than thank and glorify the God that had created him as “full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty,” Lucifer’s heart was lifted up with pride and he boasted of what he was going to do. With this, he began the propagation of the lie, the worship and glorification of the creature more than the creator.

It is the fallen nature of all men to be unthankful, not only to God, but to all to whom we should give thanks. Children are not thankful to parents, citizens are not thankful to their government, spouses are not thankful to one another. All of these examples are symptoms of the man’s unthankful heart.

The third step to a better life is to be thankful. Be thankful for all that anyone does for you here in this life, but especially be thankful for all that God has done for you in Christ.

Don’t Do Your Own Thing

Paul’s final instruction concerning the life of Christ is submission.

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. . . . Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; . . . Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. . . . And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; . . . And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. Ephesians 5:21,22,25,6:1,4,5,9

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: . . . Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 3:18-22,4:1

Paul gives instruction on submission of specific categories of people; wives, husbands, children, parents, servants, and masters. However, the general overriding principle that Paul deals with is in the first verse quoted above from Ephesians 5 where Paul writes that we are to submit ourselves “one to another in the fear of God.” The different categories of people

have specific applications of that general principle.

To understand this principle we must understand the Scriptural definition of submission. Submission is often viewed as cowering under authoritarian dictates. This is not the way Paul describes true submission. To truly submit to someone is to value and esteem their needs above your own. Paul described it in Philippians 2.

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Philippians 2:1-8

The world and society tells us to do our own thing, to look out for number one, to *find* ourselves. The message of Scripture is just the opposite. Scripture teaches to esteem others better than ourselves, to look on the things of others before our own. Our example is the attitude of Christ in offering himself on the cross for our sin. True submission is born out of love.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

Christ did not consider His own benefit. He considered ours. He was willing to be made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. (See II Corinthians 5:21) This is the example that Paul uses for submission.

Wives submit to husbands but husbands are to love their wives; true love is the beginning of submission. A husband who truly loves his wife will value and esteem her needs above his own. Children submit to parents but parents are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. There is no parent who truly loves their children who does not understand the necessity of placing their children’s needs above their own to accomplish that goal. Servants submit to masters but masters are to show a care and concern for their servants born out of love. In these examples, submission is not a one-way street; hence Paul’s admonition of “submit one to another.”

The fourth step to a better life is true submission that grows out of love.

Four Steps to a Better Life

Get a Life –The one you have is no good. Let God crucify it and give you the Life of Christ.

Talk to Yourself –Sing the truth of God’s Word into your heart and mind.

Be Thankful – Thank God for all the wonderful blessings He gave you in Christ Jesus.

Don’t Do Your Own Thing – True joy comes from serving and submitting to the needs of others.

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