

# A NEW WAY OF BEING / A NEW WAY OF LIVING

## II CORINTHIANS 5:14-17

One day, about 356 years before the birth of Jesus, in the Macedonian capital city of Pella , a young boy was born to King Philip II and his wife Olympias. They named him Alexander. Alexander had a topnotch education. In fact, he was educated by the famous philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle trained the young man in rhetoric, literature, science, medicine, and philosophy. The young man was also trained in physical activities such as horseback riding, fitness, and swordsmanship. He was brilliant in every way.

At 20 years old, Alexander's world was rocked. Some rebels assassinated his father and all of a sudden, Alexander found himself the king of Macedonia . Life was very dangerous. His life was in danger, his mother's life was in danger, and the kingdom was threatened with instability.

Alexander rose to the occasion. Within one year, he put the rebellion down and was elected by a congress of states in Corinth . His position as King of Greece was once again established. The very next year, Alexander pressed eastward to expand his kingdom into Persia. In 9 short years, Alexander had conquered land as far east as northern Europe and as far west as India . He conquered as far north as modern day Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan. He occupied modern day Iraq , Iran , central Asia and almost all of the Middle-East. He had conquered most of the ancient world.

He spread Greek culture, Greek philosophy, and Greek Language throughout the world. In fact by the time Jesus came onto the scene, Rome had conquered the world. However the common language remained Greek. Alexander caught a fever and died at 33 years old. Alexander became known as "Alexander the great."

It is reported that during one campaign, one of the young soldiers under his command had been continually and seriously misbehaving. He wasn't training well. He wasn't preparing well, and he had a serious attitude problem. What made things worse was the fact that the soldier's name was Alexander also. Since by this time, Alexander's army consisted of foreign soldiers as well as his native Greeks, this young Greek soldier was bringing the reputation of the rest of the Greek soldiers into question.

When word reached Alexander the great, he sent for the young troop.

I imagine when the young soldier reported, Alexander had him stand at attention. He walked in front of him, stared at him, walked around him, and then back in front of him. I'm pretty sure he didn't speak for a while, which I'm equally sure made this young soldier nervous. Finally, the commander came face to face with the young soldier, got up in his business and said, "Soldier, what's your name?"

"Alexander, sir," came the reply.

Alexander the great, now eyeball to eyeball, nose to nose, staring coldly into the young soldier's eyes, speaking through clenched teeth said, "Soldier, either change your behavior or change your name."

### **CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR, OR CHANGE YOUR NAME.**

About 333 years later, another baby was born. His name was Jesus. He too was brilliant and came to conquer. He too managed to conquer and amass a great kingdom. He too died at 33 years old, only not of a fever, but in battle. Jesus conquered sin, Satan, and death on the cross. Jesus conquered and died, not for personal glory, but because of the love He has for people. Jesus rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. There He continues to rule His kingdom. While on earth Jesus went by the name, "Son of God." He wore the Name of His Father, and brought credit to the name.

In the city of Antioch, a group of people were so committed to following Jesus that their fellow citizens started to mock them. They called them "little-Christ's." They became known as *Christians*. They bore the name of Christ with love and with dignity. They changed their attitudes, their behavior, and their names. No longer were they Jack or Jane. No longer were they Greek or Roman or Asian. No longer were they bankers or craftsmen or soldiers. No, now they were simply known as Christian. And it seems as if Christ would never have had to say to them, "Either change your behavior or change your name."

I think that we often approach Christianity from the negative. We say, "Do not steal, do not lie, do not be sexually immoral, do not be unforgiving, jealous, or bitter, etc." And traditionally during Lent, we try to give up bad behaviors, and even sometimes try to replace them with good behaviors.

This Lenten season, I would like to challenge us to approach this 40 day journey with

a new approach. It is true that we are all sinners. It is true that if it weren't for God's continued grace, we would all be doomed to spend eternity in hell. It is true that we must continually confess our sin. Indeed we are truly sinners saved by grace.

However, we have an equally true identity in Christ as well. We are saints. We are new creations in Christ. We have a new name. It is Christian. When people ask us who we are, we tend to answer in terms of nationality, gender, marital status, profession, or other identifiers. We say, "I am an American, I am a husband, a father, a son, a pastor, etc.", but those are all worldly identities.

During this Lenten season, I would like us to drop all identities except one, *Christian*. We are little-Christ. We are children of God Most High.

In tonight's passage, the Apostle Paul says in verse 16, "*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.*" In other words, we are no longer to let the world define who we are. The world has beaten down the identity of women from the beginning of human culture to this day. In Christ there is no distinction between male and female. We are simply Christian. In the world, there is personal racism, institutional racism, and a ranking of order based on race and culture. In Christ there is no distinction between races. There is only Christian. In the world people are valued by how much education they have, how much money they have, or how much power and influence they have. In Christ there is no distinction between rich and poor, influential and disenfranchised. There is only Christian.

Paul goes on to say in verse 16, "*Though we once regarded Christ in this (worldly) way, we do so no longer.*" In other words, the world looked at Jesus as a failure. He was crucified on a cross. The world today looks at Jesus as irrelevant. But those who come to understand the death and resurrection have a whole new outlook on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is no longer that helpless baby in a manger. Jesus is no longer that pathetic suffering figure on the cross. Jesus is no longer that corpse lying in a cold tomb. Jesus Christ is now the King of kings and Lord of lords. He doesn't rule from the manger. He no longer rules from the cross. He no longer rules from the grave. He rules from His throne in heaven. We should no longer view Jesus as the babe in the manger. We should no longer view Jesus as the dying savior. We should now look at Jesus as the victor over sin, Satan, and death. Jesus is our Lord.

What does this have to do with our new approach to Lent? I would like us to try and live this next 40 days identifying with Christ rather than reacting to and fighting against

the world. For example, verse 14 portrays us as dying with Christ. In other words, let us try to imagine ourselves dead to earthly existence. For example, what does a dead man need with a naked woman? What does a dead woman need with money? What ladders can dead people climb? Let us focus on the fact that as Christians, we now inhabit heaven with Jesus. Our interests are to be in the things that Jesus is interested in. So during this next 40 days, let us consider ourselves dead to the lusts of this world, the pride of this world and our status in this world.

So we have died with Christ. Now look at verse 15. Let us live for Christ. In identifying with the death of Jesus, we are in essence dying to all the lies of this world we have believed. In identifying with the resurrection of Jesus, we are in essence identifying with the power He gives us to live holy lives. We are no longer to only identify ourselves as sinners saved by grace. We are to likewise identify ourselves as saints, as children of God, as Christians, and as little-christs. We have a new name. That should cause us to act in new ways.

I want to focus on the first phrase of verse 14 and put it together with verse 17. Verse 14 starts out with the phrase, *"For Christ's love compels us."* The love of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, compelled them to come up with a plan of salvation for us. That plan included a horrific moment of pain and anguish in the Trinity. The Son would have to experience an emotional abandonment from the Father. The Father would have to experience watching His Son suffer and die while He stood by doing nothing. The Holy Spirit would hover in the middle experiencing the pain of it all. It was love that drove God to suffer and die for us.

It is now love that compels God to live in us and empower us to accomplish all He has destined us for. Now look at verse 17. It is because of God's compelling love that when we receive Jesus, we become new creations. He didn't just fix up the old John. He didn't just fine tune any of you. He junked the old John. He killed the old you. He killed the old me. He made us over new. We are now saints so let's quit living as sinners.

Here is the approach I want us to take. Instead of fighting off bad feelings for other people like anger, jealousy, bitterness, or unforgiveness, die to those feelings. Put them aside. Dead men can't be bitter. Dead women can't be jealous.

Identify with Christ. Look at other people the way Jesus does. After all, we are little-christs. Start to pray for the salvation of people. Pray that God would bless them. Thank God for giving them so much and pray that God would give them more. Pray

for others and actively love them. Soon, we won't have to fight the sins of bitterness, jealousy, or anger because we will be filled with love.

Instead of fighting off sexual sin, die to it. Dead people have no use for sex. Focus on the purity of Jesus. Find new, exciting, and creative ways to be pure. Find new ways to dress. Find new thoughts to embrace. Learn what true intimacy is all about. Instead of fighting of sexually immoral thoughts and behaviors, aggressively embrace purity.

It is a whole new way of approaching the world. The Apostle Paul put it this way, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*

Alexander the great told the delinquent soldier who had the same name as he did either to change his name or change his behavior.

Jesus is saying, "I gave you My Name. Live up to it." You and I are new creations in Jesus. We wear His Name, *Christian*. Let's live up to it. Jesus was compelled to serve and rescue us because of love.

Let us allow that same love to compel us to love Him by loving and serving both God and one another. St. Francis really had that attitude in his prayer known as *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace*:

*"LORD, Make me an instrument of Your peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."*

We have chosen to wear the name Christian. Let us forget our worldly designators and start to live like Jesus. Paul goes on to say after these verses that we are ambassadors of God's Kingdom.

It is through us that He desires to rescue people from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death. If we start to spend our time, money, and energy pursuing saintly things, we will not have to spend so much time and energy fighting off the sins of this world.

We have new names, a new way of being, and a new way of living.

In the celebration of ashes, we have identified ourselves as sinners.

In the celebration of communion let us remember that Jesus calls us friends and identifies us as Saints.