

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

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# New Life Comes Forth From Death

*It Is No Longer I Who Live, But Christ Who Lives In Me*

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1 - “Behold, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5) God is renewing creation. He has made every provision for each of us to become a new person.

2 - Making something anew is not the same as making it the first time. It is a re-making. In the fullest sense, salvation is about re-creating what has been ruined.

3 - What is involved in the process of re-making something?

- The old—that which is damaged—must first be removed.
- The new can then be formed.

4 - What does the process of re-making a person look like?

- The old life must first be removed—put to death.
- A new life—an eternal kind of life—Christ’s life—is then formed in its place.

5 - What are the outcomes when a person is re-made—redeemed? Forgiveness of sin? Heaven when we die? Absolutely! Is that all? No! There is more—much more!

6 - My sinful behavior expresses the broken, lost person I have become. Would God work forgiveness and heaven but leave character—who I really am—unaffected?

7 - “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

8 - Being born again is not the end goal. It starts a process by which I am gradually re-formed toward becoming like Jesus on the inside. The fruit is Christlike behavior.

9 - Jesus: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil.” (Luke 6:45a)

10 - Two megatrends guide and empower this life-process:

- I submit to Christ as he, by his Spirit, removed what is death in me.
- I rely on Christ as he, by his Spirit, replaces my brokenness with his beauty.

11 - I do not control my re-creation. God does. But I must choose it. The Holy Spirit gradually forms new life within me as:

- I choose to rely on God (walk by faith) in all of life.

- I validate my decision to rely on God by obeying him.

12 - "Death" here has nothing to do with self-abuse or condemnation. It is a grace-filled offer to remove the undesirable effects of wrongness within me.

13 - "For one who has died has been set free from sin." (Romans 6:7) This is a death I must choose. God will not force it on me.

14 - These two processes permeate the teachings of Jesus and the apostles:

- I allow Christ's death to work in me. I join him on the cross.
- Christ, by his Spirit, forms new life—his resurrection life—within me.

15 - Jesus: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

16 - The apostles: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20)

17 - These truths not only permeated the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. They lived what they taught! They chose death, knowing it was the avenue to life.

18 - Jesus: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him." (Philippians 2:8b-9a)

19 - Apostles: "We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." (2 Corinthians 4:11)

20 - Throughout Church history Christ's followers, across Christian traditions, have taught that the path to life in God's Presence and Kingdom leads through death.

21 - The well-known prayer attributed to the Roman Catholic, Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226), ends with these words, "It is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

22 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Protestant who stood against Nazi terror in his native Germany, wrote, "Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death."

23 - That new life emerges from death is a principle seen throughout nature. Jesus used this reality to illustrate his teaching.

24 - Jesus: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

## What Must Die? The Self-life!

25 - Why is the choice to die unavoidable in accessing Christ's new life? Because the root from which all sin grows—self-centeredness (self-worship)—blocks the way.

26 - God created us for a relationship with him of mutual agape love. We were to be central in his affections, and he was to be central in ours.

27 - A scribe asked Jesus which commandment was most important. Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." (Mark 12:30a)

28 - This would allow God to meet our every need directly, each moment, as we rely on him alone. His power, wisdom and kindness would be fully available to us.

29 - Sadly, our first parents violated this arrangement. They turned from God as the center of their affection. They installed the self-life there instead.

30 - Being separated from God by their own choice removed them from the Source who alone could meet their needs. They were left relying on themselves.

31 - But they were unable to meet their own needs. They slid into neediness, then further into damage, ruin and lostness. We have each done the same thing.

32 - Self-worship leads to self-reliance, self-will, self-effort. Self-worship drives us unavoidably into the darkness and lostness of the self-life.

33 - The "old man" or "natural man" of Scripture develops out of the choices, thoughts, emotions, behaviors and relational wounds generated by self-worship.

34 - We need to be saved from the self-life. It was formed as we sought fulfillment in all the wrong ways. It results in emptiness, pain, darkness—lostness.

35 - "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done." (Romans 1:28)

36 - My ruined self-life must be put to death. This allows me to be re-formed with a new life—God's life—eternal life. I must choose it, but I don't do it—God does.

## The Christian Believer Is "In Christ"

37 - The process whereby the ruined self-life is put to death and replaced by God's new life takes place "in Christ"—a condition of God's design and grace.

38 - By repentance and faith we turn again to God. He then sets us "in Christ". This is a mystery. We can't understand it by trying to analyze it—by living in our heads.

39 - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17) I just rely on God's word.

40 - When God sets me "in Christ", by his grace I am given a new reality. But I am responsible to access its benefits—by daily choices to trust expressed by obedience.

41 - What is meant by “in Christ”? One way to understand this: Rather than me trying to hold on to Christ, Christ is actually holding on to me.

42 - What is meant by “in Christ”? This means that God has united me with Christ in his death and resurrection. When he died, I died. When he rose, I rose.

43 - “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:5)

44 - This may seem unreal. I died to sin? It doesn't feel like it! I often fail when faced with temptation. Now I must decide not to live governed by what I feel.

45 - “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:11)  
“Consider” means to choose to rely on this being true and to act accordingly.

46 - “Do not present your members to sin...present yourselves to God...and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.” (Romans 6:13)

47 - Our “members” are our bodily parts, but perhaps also our wills, thoughts, emotions. Spiritual practices assist us in presenting our members to God.

48 - Accepting a truth by faith is more than giving mental assent. I make choices, take actions that are logical if the truth is indeed true. Faith without works is dead.

49 - For a disciple of Christ to vacillate between yielding to the self-life or dying to it is to vacillate between unreality (yielding to self) and reality (dying to self).

50 - Yielding to the self-life obstructs my formation by the Spirit into Christlikeness. Dying to the self-life co-operates with the Spirit as he forms Christlikeness in me.

## What Does This Look Like In Practice?

51 - Limiting these truths to the realm of theology renders them sterile—inoperative. They must shape my choices and my actions. Some examples:

52 - **I allocate time to be with God—to practice his Presence.** To do this I must say “no” to other things—even good things. I “die” to them.

53 - **I choose not to demand my own way.** When my will is crossed, I lay down my reactions. I “die” to retaliation. I make space for my Father to work his will.

54 - **I “die” to any desire to win over others,** to be more important, more successful, more praised. I thank my Father for the place in life he has given me.

55 - **I choose to learn to be a servant.** Jesus: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” (Mark 9:36) I “die” to any desire to be important.

56 - **When wronged, I reject “pay back”.** I accept God’s role as Judge. I entrust my abuser to him. I “die” to anger and revenge.

57 - **I choose to release (“die” to) my felt need to be in control.** I accept that it is God, not I, who is in control. I marvel in the deep peace this brings.

58 - **I choose spiritual practices that train me in dying to self.** One example: Fasting teaches me that I do not need to be in bondage to my bodily appetites.

59 - **In every life situation I seek to learn to love.** Love is choosing to set aside self interest in order to serve the interest of another. Jesus modeled the way.

60 - This teaching must never leave us focused on death. The whole point is life. In Christ, the cross precedes the resurrection. Death is the doorway into life.

61 - Christ’s ways gradually mature me into life characterized by victory. Yes, there will be failures along the way. We grow toward victory, not perfection.

62 - My failures offer me fresh chances to “die”:

- I admit my failure. I confess. At least once a day is not too often.
- I repent.
- I choose to trust God’s Word that I am “in Christ”.
- I renew my decision to rely on Him in everything.

63 - “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” (Philippians 3:10)