

# Raised to Life

If we have put our trust in the Lord Jesus, the New Testament tells us that we are 'in Christ', that our lives have been joined to his life. We may have thought that the grace of God is only about forgiveness but hopefully we are discovering that there is much more to it! Our Father has a great inheritance to reveal to us (***Ephesians 1:18***). "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things" (***Romans 8:32***). However long we have been on the road, there is always more to discover, more grace for us to experience.

For many of us, our first experience of the grace of God will have been closely connected with our sense of failure and guilt and the promise of forgiveness through the sacrifice that the Lord Jesus Christ made for us when he died on the cross. As it says in ***1 John 1:7*** "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." But now we have begun to see that there is more - much more!

We have been reading in ***Romans 6&7***, where Paul has explained that God's grace means that we have not just received forgiveness through Jesus' death, but that we have been identified so closely with him that our old life also died with him and, along with it, all our slavery to sin, failure and bondage to rules which have only served to bring us into condemnation.

God says that we are dead to sin and law and that there is now a new law at work in us: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (***Romans 8:1-2***). Or, as Peter says in ***1 Peter 2:24***, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness". Yes, all the 'negative stuff' is necessary, to deal with the problems we have, but the end purpose is 100% positive.

Back in ***Romans 6:4-11***, Paul says that the reason we have been included in the death of Jesus is **so that we can be included in his resurrection life!** All the more reason for us to take hold of the fact that we are dead to sin and law, so that we can really experience the reality of new life!

Do you see a pattern emerging here? Our experience of God's grace closely follows what Jesus has done for us - what the old theologians called 'the finished work of Christ'.

Because his blood has been shed, I am forgiven. Because his body was broken on the cross, I am dead to my old life - to sin, failure, law and condemnation (and more!) Because he has been raised to life after death, I have a new life in me by the Holy Spirit. How has this happened? Because God has placed me in Christ (***1 Corinthians 1:30*** again!)

When I came to the Lord at the age of 11, I was pretty soon told that I had been 'born again' and certainly there were some changes in my life that seemed to show that something real had happened. I soon adopted the shorthand that 'born again' = 'real Christian', and of course I became aware of the conversation between Jesus and

Nicodemus in **John 3** and identified with having been 'born of the Spirit' - not that I understood very much about what that really meant.

A few years later in the school choir, we were singing a piece based on **1 Peter 1** which included the words "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (**verse 3**, King James version). By then, I was reading a different translation which said "By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." I was a bit puzzled: I knew I had been born again, but I didn't see what the resurrection of Jesus had to do with it.

It is only in the last year or two that this piece of the puzzle has seemed to fit more completely into place for me! Looking at the Greek, I found that the word that Jesus uses when talking to Nicodemus doesn't just mean 'born'. Its fundamental meaning is 'fathered, generated, conceived' - a process at the very beginning of our existence, 9 months before physical birth, when our genetic makeup is determined. We now know that is the time when our DNA is 'written' by the combining of the DNA from our parents, and our physical attributes are finalised - eye colour, hair colour, whether we will tend to be tall or short, many of our bodily and facial characteristics ('has he got his father's nose?'), and so on, all long before we are actually born.

So what is Jesus really saying to Nicodemus? Not just that he needs to be re-born, but that he needs to be 're-fathered'. No wonder Nicodemus reels back in amazement. That is totally impossible! In today's language, Jesus would be saying 'you need to have your DNA re-written'. Like Nicodemus, we would say 'that just can't be done'.

But look at what Peter has written in **1 Peter 1:3**. Again, the Greek word means 're-fathered' and he is saying that we have been re-fathered "into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead". "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (**1 Peter 1:23**)

This the "law of the Spirit who gives life" which Paul writes about in **Romans 8:2**. By his grace, God has not just done away with our old life with all its captivity to failure and condemnation. He has re-written our spiritual DNA through our inclusion with the resurrection of Jesus. Wow!

Our old life had sin, failure and condemnation written right through it, like an old-fashioned stick of rock. Even after being forgiven, it still couldn't do anything to meet God's standards or please him in any way. He has disposed of that old life and given us a totally new one, one that **does** please him because it is the life of his own Son!

So, what are we to do about all this? Is it just so much theory and theology? What practical use can all this have for us? How can we gain any benefit?

The Lord Jesus says "Remain in me, as I also remain in you" in **John 15:4** ('abide' in older versions) and, as we begin to see more of what is ours in him, we learn to

take hold of it and use it, to stay where our Father has placed us - in him. This is an active process, not a passive one. If I let you use my house and you stay in it, then I hope you will make use of all the facilities it provides - heating, lighting, hot and cold water, drainage, sleeping accommodation, cooking provision, parking, storage and so on. It would be very strange if you came through the front door and just camped in the hallway, trying to manage with any resources you might have brought with you and not taking advantage of the provision on offer. If you did that, you would not be really living in my house, would you?

In **Colossians**, Paul uses another picture of how we can leave our (dead) old life and take hold of our new life in Jesus. It's like taking off one set of clothes and putting on a new set, he says. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.** When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." (**Colossians 3:1-11**) We **have died** with Christ, and so we are able to consign to death the characteristics of our old life - taking them off like a coat - and then 'put on' the new life which is ours by the resurrection of Jesus.

In practical terms: When we are faced with temptation, **1 Corinthians 10:13** tells us that God provides us with a way of escape. What is that escape route? To hide in the fact that our old life is dead, that we have died to sin and failure and have a new life in Christ.

But often our bigger problem is condemnation. Don Francisco tells how one day he discovered packages of sin all over his life, things he had got rid of long before, and then Satan presented him with one with his name on it. "You say you've got some sin that belongs to me? No, that don't belong to me. That belongs to Jesus. You say it's got my name on it? Let me see that. No, that's not me; that guy died, way back in 1974. Everything he owned belongs to Jesus. You go talk to him - I've got no business with you . . ." Exactly! (Don Francisco, *Sneakin'*, album: *That I May Know You*, 2005)

Our Father is committed to changing us from the inside by his Spirit and those changes come as a result of our responses to what he shows us (**Romans 10:17** "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.") It may seem risky as we learn to live by 'the law of the Spirit who gives life' rather than by man-made rules or the fear of what others will think, but it is the only way by which we will move towards revealing "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (**Colossians 1:27**)

Trying to change ourselves, rather than going along with our Father's provision, will only throw us back into religious legalism, as Paul makes clear in **Colossians 2:20-23**. It may look good, he says, but it is totally ineffective to change your life. Legalism always clouds our vision and robs us of liberty: "Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (**2 Corinthians 3:15-18**)

There is, of course, **more!**

The Lord Jesus has not only shed his blood, had his body broken, been buried and risen from the dead. What happened next, and where is he now? He physically ascended from the earth and took his place in glory at the right hand of the Father. If our spiritual progress and the transformation of our lives is closely tied to what he has done, what difference does his ascension and glorification make to us?

There is a clear link between Jesus being at the right hand of the Father and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in power. In **John 7:37-39**, it says "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

We experience forgiveness because Jesus' blood was shed for us. We experience freedom from slavery to sin, failure and condemnation because his body was broken for us. We experience the reality of a positive new life because of his resurrection. We experience the power of the Holy Spirit poured out in and through our lives because he sits at the right hand of the Father.

All of this is **by grace**, given to us freely by our Father through the fact that he has placed us in his Son. We can't earn any of it in any way, but we can simply receive it - all of it - because he has given it to us in Christ.

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (**Romans 8:32**)

"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (**1 Peter 1:23**)

"Dwell always upon what God has done in Christ and let him take care of what he will do in you" - Watchman Nee

David Taylor August 2015

Further copies can be downloaded from [www.justonecandle.uk](http://www.justonecandle.uk)