

Lesson 1

A MEMBER OF HIS BODY: A CALLING OF GOD

If you have been raised up with Christ by faith in God's power to eternally unite you with His Son, then you have been called by God into the body of Jesus Christ. This truth is foundational to walking worthy of your calling as a son of God. How well do you understand what God has called you out of and what He has called you into? In this first lesson, we need to get a firm grip on these two aspects of God's grace if we are to live according to God's will and please Him as members of the body of Christ.

GOD CALLED YOU OUT OF SELFISH INDEPENDENCE

When God transferred you out of darkness into the kingdom of His Son (Colossians 1:13), He applied a gracious work done on your behalf when Jesus died on the cross. He crucified your old self which is sometimes called the old man. Here's what the Apostle Paul taught the Romans and the Colossians about this gracious work of God in Christ at the cross.

Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6).

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2:11).

The old self and the body of flesh are one in the same: man enslaved to the sin of living for self instead of God. God baptized those who are His into the body of His Son, and at the cross removed the entire self-life with all its evil deeds so He could transfer you from the domain of selfish living into the

kingdom of His Son. This term old self may sound like a strange term, so let's unpack the concept behind it.

SELF BLINDS YOU TO GOD AND TO SIN

When you were enslaved to the domain of darkness, you were blind to the fact that life was all about you and that manner of living was sin against God your creator. Why were you blind to it? First, you were blind to it because you had no understanding and did not have the life of God in you. Paul's description of the Gentiles fits everyone.

Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness (Ephesians 4:18-19).

You were blind to the sinfulness of self-life also because it is the universal philosophy of the world into which you were born. Self-actualization and self-ambition are considered virtues according to man's wisdom. The entire world system worships self. Every false religion and every government in the history of the world is focused on self. So when you were born into this world, you were held captive by your culture. Paul warned the Colossian church about this kind of living.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Colossians 2:8).

SATAN FATHERED THE BEAST OF SELF

The fall of man placed a greedy beast inside of everyone in Adam's race—the beast of self. Fathered by Satan and in his image, the beast blasphemes God by declaring self to be God. Self is only fulfilled when it is in control of everything and is first place in every situation and relationship. The mindset of the beast of self is on earthly things instead of heavenly things. It is independent in that it submits to no one (unless the submission will ultimately advance its cause), but is dependent in that it uses everyone and everything for self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction, and self-significance.

The beast of self demands to be worshipped above the God of the heavens, the Father of Jesus Christ. Why? Because the worship of self is the image of the

father of self, Satan, who coveted superiority to God, his creator. The sperm of Satan implanted in Adam and Eve when they followed his earthly wisdom created a creature in the image of its father. Just as Satan rebelled against God and declared his independence, so self in every man rebels against God and declares his independence from God. The Lord Jesus taught the Apostle Paul to call this fallen, selfish, earth-focused state the old man or the old self.

THE BEAST OF SELF MUST DIE

The concept of the old self may be found in many passages of Scripture. Let's read a few of these and notice its enmity and hostility to God. The beast of self must die.

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me (Luke 9:23).

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices (Colossians 3:9).

That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit (Ephesians 4:22)...

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us (1 John 4:3-6).

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die (Romans 8:12-13);

Jesus and His apostles Paul and John taught that self had to die or be put off if someone were to experience eternal life. Sometimes they referred to the self as the old man, the flesh, or the antichrist. The term antichrist means to be in the place of Christ or God. That is precisely the place self demands. It is also the same as blaspheming God. Perhaps you remember Jesus was accused of blaspheming God when He agreed with the Pharisees that He was the King

of the Jews. They condemned Him for blasphemy because they viewed Him as declaring Himself to be God. That's why self is such a terrible, wicked beast: it blasphemes God!

So when you were called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, you were called out of living for self as God. Before we were born again by God's Spirit and transferred into the kingdom of God's Son, we lived according to the traditions of men, according to empty deceptions, according to the prince of the power of the air, according to the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience. The Apostle Paul described the old self well in his letter to the Ephesians.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest (Ephesians 2:1-3).

So the bottom line is this: If God has raised you up with Christ, then He has called you out of a life of selfishness and independence. Living for self-ambition, self-significance, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment is the old self and the primary place of repentance. Upon coming to Christ, we lay aside the old way of living which always asked, "What about me?! What makes me happy? What makes me significant and fulfilled?"

GOD CALLED YOU INTO THE BODY OF JESUS CHRIST

Read what the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the Colossians.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful (Colossians 3:15).

For the *Walking Worthy Series* I have defined a calling in life as an irrevocable act of God that establishes a special relationship with responsibilities, privileges, and promises that provide hope for the future. When God saved you and transferred you out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love, He called you into the body of Christ, a new self.

THE NEW SELF WAS CREATED WHEN JESUS WAS RESURRECTED

This gracious act of God established a special relationship with Christ through the other members of His body. Therefore, if you know you are loved and forgiven through Jesus Christ, then you are a member of the body of Christ and no longer an isolated self. You have a new self which is irrevocably united to everyone else who has experienced God's love and forgiveness.

How did this happen? Just like God graciously removed the old self by baptizing you into the death of Jesus Christ, God also graciously created a new self by uniting you with the resurrection of His Son.

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:12).

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5).

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Since God created this new man in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, throughout the rest of history, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God calls each member into the body of His Son through the gospel by faith.

Please notice in Colossians 2:12 above, that the baptism in which you were buried and raised up with Christ, came through faith in the working of God. That's why I think water baptism is a symbol of this baptism into the resurrected body of Christ by God through faith in God's work. Since it is through faith in God's work, "a circumcision made without hands (Colossians 2:11)," it is called "believer's baptism." Christian baptism is not a baptism into a covenant family or promises, but a baptism into the death and removal of the old man, which worshipped self, and into the creation of a new man, a new self which is created in the image of Christ.

Whereas the old man was one man with many members each focused on self, the new man is one man with many members each focused on Jesus Christ. This new man is a corporate new man which has been created by God

and is being revealed as the members of the body are converted and grow together in Christ.

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12:5).

When God regenerated you, He did not call you into a church, but into the body of Christ. When the body of Christ gathers, it is called the church. This is an important distinction to make. If you have been raised up with Christ, then you are a member of His body. And if you are a member of His body, you will then want to assemble with the members so you can put on the new self.

THE NEW SELF MUST BE PUT ON

Just as the old self with its selfish independence and significance must be laid aside, the new self with its dependence upon Jesus Christ and desire to see Him receive significance and glory must be put on. Here's how the Apostle Paul was taught by the Lord Jesus with regard to this new self.

And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all (Colossians 3:10-11).

And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Ephesians 4:23-24).

CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL

This new self is one which is according to truth or true knowledge. The truth that governs this new man is that "Christ is all and in all." What a dramatic difference this kind of thinking is to that of the old self! The old self lived by this lie: self is all and in all. One's entire life was governed by this mindset that was earthly, natural, and demonic (James 3:15) and focused on fleshly, outward distinctions.

In contrast, the new self lives the truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ: Christ is all and in all. The entire life is governed by a mindset that is heavenly, spiritual, and focused on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. One of my favorite passages in the New Testament describes the believer's mindset.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:1-3).

What does this mean? It means that as we relate to one another in the body of Christ, we are relating to Christ. Why? Because Christ is in all. Earlier in Colossians, Paul wrote the same thing in different words.

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything (Colossians 1:18).

If you have been raised up with Christ, then you believe He is the head of the body and is to have first place in everything. That's another way of saying Christ is all and in all. As you live your life, you have a new mindset that is being renewed each day as you think not about yourself, but about Jesus Christ and the members of His body. You have been called into the body of Christ!

PUTTING ON THE NEW SELF IS A LIFELONG PROCESS

Putting on the new self takes practice. Just as you laid aside the old self with its evil practices (Colossians 3:9), you now put on the new self with its Christ-like practices of love, forgiveness, and patience with others. That's why the Apostle Paul emphasized the renewing of the mind or setting the mind upon the gospel and the truth about the new self. I'll not unpack what this means right now, but save it for another lesson. For now, it is important for you to realize that your new life in Christ is not about you, but about Christ. This kind of thinking takes practice and a renewal of the mind so the new self in Christ can be revealed. This is what it means to walk worthy of your calling as a member of the body of Christ. When that happens you will be revealed with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4).

So, if you haven't already been thinking this way about being a Christian and a member of the body of Christ, now's the time to get started. I invite you to begin the personal application exercises with the prayer the Apostle Paul prayed for the church in Colossae. I think his prayer communicated the goal of this volume. You can't walk in a manner worthy of your calling as a member of the body of Christ if you don't know what it means to live that way. Here's Paul's prayer and my prayer for you.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light (Colossians 1:9-12).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Personalize Colossians 1:9-12 into a prayer for yourself and the other members of the body of Christ with whom you are doing this study.
2. Write a description of the way you lived before you were born again. Describe that way of living and its relation to self. (You may need to write it on another piece of paper.)

2. In what ways do you see the beast of self express itself in the world?

3. In what ways do you see the beast of self express itself in the church?

4. In what ways have you made Christ first place in your relationships with other members of the body of Christ?

5. What do you think the implications are for you if you put on the new self?

6. Write down the names of members of the body of Christ to whom you need repent for not making them more important than yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in what to say and do in order to put on the new self for the glory of Christ.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Choose two or more verses from this lesson to memorize this week and write them below.

GROUP INTERACTION

1. Share the verses you memorized with a group member.
2. Discuss the ways you see the beast of self express itself in the world.
3. Discuss the ways you see the beast of self express itself in the church.
4. Discuss the ways the church would be different if everyone understood they were called into the body of Christ and were to lay aside the old self and put on the new self.
5. Share what new thoughts or knowledge you gained from this study and how you are going to put them into practice.