

## On Behalf of Others

By Linda Rex

**June 16, 2024, Proper 6 / After Pentecost**—As part of my morning routine, I often read a chapter out of a book on theology or the Christian faith. My most recent book has been *Hidden in Contradiction* by Jeff McSwain, which I am rereading. In the chapter I read this morning, *New and Old*, Jeff talks about our New Testament passage for this Sunday, 2 Corinthians 5:6–10, 14–17.

Jeff shows how we often read the last portion of this passage, “the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”, and assume that this means that when we come to faith in Christ, we are made new, so we will never repeat the old ways we were caught up in before. This doesn’t wholly reflect the reality of our walk in Christ, for any of us who are honest with ourselves and others, and are truthful before God, know that our thought-life and daily walk very often do not fully measure up to the goodness and glory of God we were created to reflect.

Jeff’s point in this chapter is that because all persons died with Christ and rose with Christ, we are all caught up in the reality of the already-not-yet of God’s kingdom. By faith we walk in the new life which is ours, which is “hidden with Christ in God.” But in our broken flesh, we still find ourselves at times walking in old ways, those ways which Jesus crucified on the cross and buried with himself in the grave, those things we are dead to. Just as Jesus is now fully God and fully man, right now we live daily in that place where all that God created us to be and redeemed us to is true, but we are still having to experience and live in the false self, the “old man” as the apostle Paul calls it. We are growing up in Christ, maturing in our faith, becoming more and more who God created us to be, but we will never fully reflect the divine nature until Jesus returns in glory and we are changed. Then all God created us to be will be fully revealed.

This is the paradox which we find difficult to understand or live in. This may be why the apostle Paul said that he would rather be “absent from the body” and “at home with the Lord”. If you are like me, there are times when this life, and our tendency to drift towards the things of this passing temporal existence, grieve us, and we long to be freed. We want to be with Jesus forever, living in the glorious, joyful bliss of God’s heavenly kingdom here on earth. The good news is that even though we will continue to live in this broken existence for a time, not only is our future life with Christ certain, but we can begin to experience moments of God’s kingdom joy and peace even now in this life by the Spirit. We participate in God’s life and mission on this earth as part of our everyday existence, even when it seems that we cannot get it right and we find ourselves breaking faith with God and others.

What holds us together and keeps us moving forward in hope is the precious gift God has given to us in his Son and in his Spirit. It is God’s love which drives us on and compels us to not only live out his kingdom life in this world, but also to share it with others. God’s love for us is so profound, so great and wonderful, that we find we want to share this good news with others. We don’t want to keep it all to ourselves.

And that is truly the heart of God, as Father, Son, and Spirit. This triune God, who for all eternity, lives in other-centered, self-giving love, was willing to do something tremendous and unthinkably amazing on behalf of his creatures and his creation. Indeed, on behalf of all of us, for our sake, the Son of God set aside the privileges of divinity for a time to join us in our humanity, in order to bring us home into the inner fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit. And in Christ, that is where we are all today.

Our hope is in Christ, in his finished work, in what he has done, is doing, and will do. God’s motive of other-centered, self-giving, sacrificial love is what motivates each of us to be other-

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centered, self-giving, and sacrificial. When you see this kind of love being expressed, God is the source of such love, whether the person knows or understands it, or not. As we see God's love being expressed in these ways, we are called to bear witness to it—to testify to the beauty and wonder of God's love. And, as we respond to the leading of the Spirit, we will find ourselves living and serving, on behalf of others. And by doing this, that we reflect the glory of God, and his Son, in the Spirit. We live in the truth of who we are as his beloved children. Praise his holy name!

*Heavenly Triune God, thank for all you have done on our behalf. By your Spirit, enable us to live, not for ourselves, but for you, Lord Jesus—you who died and rose on our behalf. Grant us the grace to live our lives as you have, on behalf of others. In your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

*“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:6–10 (11–13) 14–17 NASB*