



## **Building a Better You**

### **How Would You Like to Look?**

Most self-reporting psychological profiles simply tell you what you already think about yourself. They might use intriguing terms to describe you such as a lion or a choleric or a tribalist but the description of the label will probably be pretty close to what you already say of yourself. The most important question regarding a personality profile is not how it categorizes you but what you think of that label? Are you happy with the assessment? Is that who you want to be? Is there a way to upgrade your personality? Ten years from now, do you hope to be just as you are now or would you like to make major changes in your personality? Many in the field of psychology feel that we are mostly static in who we are; we don't make major or significant changes in our personality. Yet you probably know some people who are quite different from who they once were. In fact, they have changed so much it almost seems like they should have a different name to identify them. This of course did happen many times in the Bible where a name no longer fit and God gave different ones a new name. The Bible in fact insists that we can change quite a bit and that it is not only possible but likely if we embrace our life with God.

I once heard of a woman who believed that the earth rests upon the back of a turtle. When asked where the turtle stood, she said it stood on the shell of another turtle. "Yes, but where does that turtle stand?" "Oh, on the back of another turtle", she replied. "And that turtle?" "But of course another turtle", was the answer. "It's just turtle after turtle." Many think of themselves in this same way. It's just going to be me...this same me forever. That though isn't the plan of Christ. Notice what the Apostle Paul has to say about where God wants to take you. **Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.** (Ephesians 4:15-16 NIV) This is a far cry from a static personality. You are in the middle of a transformation, a complete reworking of your life.

Paul is of course speaking of the Church as a whole and yet there is no "growing up into him who is the Head" at the macro level...as a total church...if it isn't occurring at the same time on the micro level...among individuals. It is like saying that you can't have brown hair if each individual one is gray. Likewise, it takes billions of snowflakes falling at the same time for a snowstorm to occur. What happens in a billion Christians as a group happens in you as a critical member of that group.

Maturity in this case is tied to love. Together we will be individually saturated in love; our personality structured by love. Love is the way everything you do and think will be organized and put together. Keep this in mind as you consider maturity. Because God is love, it could be said that God is how you grow and develop. Love is the way you will see if God has filled you and made you a "grown-up". There are two parts to this maturity process that are mentioned by the Apostle Paul.

The first is the ongoing development of Christ becoming the head. Maturity by definition springs out of Christ taking charge of you, of Him driving your life. This doesn't happen by accident; you must decide this

is the way to go. The conscious decision to give control to Jesus may not be easy for you; it could even be painful. When you do so though, then love is the force generating your thoughts and actions. With this new life of salvation, it never is a question of what you are doing or thinking, it is a matter of whether Christ is the head or not. Is He in charge of the decisions you make or are you...or Satan? How do you know? If Godly love for others and for Christ is the ongoing outcome of your actions, then Christ is increasingly the head. Christ as head and real love go hand in hand in salvation.

The second part of this is the phrase at the end of the passage, "grows and builds itself up in love". This is complex grammatically but easy to explain. Building yourself up in love is a joint effort between you and the church and Christ. You can't do this on your own. You become stuck and can only go so far in your growth if you are not intertwined with the church and with God. Maturity is a combined effort and is never a solitary work. Christ will intervene in your life and point you into a new way to love. He will empower you to make this new life of love not only possible but immediately doable. You decide whether or not this new life with Christ is what you want. The church teaches you how to hear Christ speak to you and becomes your most important support team as you walk with God.

Let me explain this concept using three case studies from the Bible. When Peter the Apostle had a narrow range of love, only wanting to associate with Jews or Samaritans, the Lord came to him in a vision where he was shown a wide range of creatures that the Law did not permit Jewish people to eat. The voice from God told him to eat these foods. After the vision came to him three times, the Lord sent Peter on his way to share Christ with a household of non-Jews. Peter's level of love needed to dramatically increase and so God impressed that upon him. Second, when the Apostle Paul, before he was Christian was on his way to Damascus to arrest and oppress Christians living there, the Lord intervened and Christ spoke directly to him in a great light that blinded him. This had two effects. One, it led Paul to salvation and a love empowered relationship with Christ. Second, it expanded Paul's love for Christians and the Church because he became a part of the Christian family. Third, is the most broken woman you might ever hear about. Mary Magdalene was emotionally, psychologically, and mentally wrecked by seven demons who took hold of her heart and mind. The wild nature this created in her made her an outcast, isolated from those around her. Jesus intervened though and cast the demons out of her. Mary's love of Jesus is well documented but not as noticed is how she became a part of the church family. She had friends, perhaps for the first time in years, people who loved her and that she loved.

I read recently of a white pastor in the early 1900s who led his church and the people of the town to lynch a black man who he thought had committed a crime. When you hear about Christian people acting in most unloving ways, it indicates just how little the connection there is between themselves and the Bible and Christ. If there is one mark that identifies a Christian as truly living with Christ, it is the high levels of love found in that person. You might not be Christian and still love but you cannot be attached closely to Christ and not be filled with an abundance of His love. My mother went through an eight year battle with breast cancer. I remember her before I went away to college vomiting loudly nearly every day when she was in the middle of her treatments. Twice my dad called me and told me to come home because she only had a few days to live. Both times though she pulled out of it. The day before Easter she passed away when she was only 48. At her memorial service, several elderly women came up to me and told me that in her last years she often took them to Safeway to get groceries as weak as she was.

Jesus takes us from being able to love and feeling like love is important to loving in ways that are beyond us. Before Paul became Apostle Paul, he was Saul, a hateful prisoner of his own self-righteousness. Persecuting the church and happy to see Christians killed, when Christ crucified met him on the road to Damascus, he almost immediately put his hope in Jesus for salvation. God's plan for him started with a humble Christian named Ananias who He wanted to baptize Saul. Afraid of Saul's power and hatred, Ananias protested to God. The Lord though was unbending. **But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the**

**people of Israel.** (Acts 9:15 NIV) When the love of Christ works its way into you...even murderers can be blessed.