

P.S.

**WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE** would have happened to you if you had decided not to follow Christ's call? What would you have done? What sort of person would you have been? What would your life have looked like?

I knew a brother once—respectable, and a high achiever—who was convinced that he would have been entirely self-centred, possibly even a criminal. While I wouldn't particularly wish to say the same of myself (though it might be true!), I saw his point. Without God, what's the point of morality, or of taking thought for anyone other than you and yours? This is the only chance you have, so get what you can for yourself by whatever means necessary; you can be sure that no one else is looking out for you. From that perspective, it's not difficult to see why the world is the way it is. Fortunately, Christ has spared us from morphing into such a mould.

But there is an alternative as to how one might have ended up, which also provokes thought. It could be that I might have ended up living a sort of life not very different from the one I lead now. Certainly there would be no attending meetings, no giving to collections, less public speaking, and such like. But could those elements be 'unhooked', as it were, from the rest of my life, to leave that remainder relatively intact and unaltered? Would I have ended up living in the same street, driving the same car and enjoying similar pastimes to the ones I enjoy now, a middle-class life that sounds suspiciously like the one I may lead now?

The thought, then, is that perhaps the Truth hasn't changed me all that much—a sufficiently disturbing possibility to merit some self-examination. I certainly know that it hasn't changed me as much as it should. Perhaps I have not been transformed sufficiently—either in lifestyle or in my thoughts—to prove that Christ has really set me free.

I was set thinking along these lines by an exhortation given by a brother over a year ago now, as we stood at the crossroads between 2004 and 2005. The brother looked back on his own life of nearly seventy years, and his pilgrimage in the Truth of fifty, to reflect on the nature of discipleship, cross-bearing, and the changes that this might or should entail to what would otherwise have been one's life. He used an analogy about a scarf that particularly struck me. I quote (with permission!):

## The life I didn't lead

"It is so easy to kid ourselves; the danger is that our upbringing in all respects—our social and ecclesial background, family and work situation—all these model us to decide how we want to be. Then we fit our discipleship around our lives, adding some sort of spiritual dimension to what we already have, like wrapping a scarf around ourselves, and so deceiving ourselves by saying that this is carrying our cross daily for the Lord. In reality, the degree to which we are prepared and commit to carrying our cross daily for our Lord depends upon the degree to which the cross of our Lord has impacted upon our hearts and minds".

The faith that we hold is one that is meant completely to transform our lives and our approach to life. It isn't a matter of having some 'core' to our lives, some sense of what we expect from life, and then wrapping the Truth around this like a decoration to charm our Lord or a useful accessory to keep the winds of judgement at bay. The way of God is meant to become our life, and we are about His business rather than our own. We cannot bolt on religious elements to our lives as an appendage to what we would otherwise have had.

This means that the principles of the Truth should affect the whole of our lifestyle. The world has a lot to say about 'lifestyle choices'—but so do the Scriptures, and in quite a different vein! Our lifestyle choices are choices made because we are Christ's. Our approach to our career, to family life, to finances and material things, our pastimes—all of these grow out of a life which should have already been grounded upon him. He is not just another element of life that must be fitted in along with all the other elements and demands that impinge upon us. He is our life. The outward appearance may to the casual observer appear to have elements in common with our peers. But the reality, and the underlying motivation that drives us, will be drastically different.

Life is to be one integrated whole, and our approach to every aspect of it should arise and grow out of the seed of the gospel which has been planted within our hearts. Transformation into a new creature, and a new life that is significantly different from the old, is what it is all about.

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